DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 608 EC 151 038

AUTHOR	Kaplan, George R.
TITLE	Looking Ahead: Issues Facing Special Education Paraprofessionals in the 1980s.
INSTITUTION	City Univ. of New York, N.Y. Graduate School and Univ. Center.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	82
GRANT	02-G007901330
NOTE	96p.; Print is broken and may reproduce poorly.
PUB TYPE	Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Certification; *Cost Effectiveness; *Disabilities; *Organizations (Groups); *Paraprofessional School Personnel; Recruitment; School Aides; *Special Education; *Statewide Planning; Unions

ABSTRACT

The third in a series of reports examines the future of special education paraprofessionals relative to cost effectiveness; unconventional programs in Arkansas, Pennsylvania, California, and Kansas; the state's role in licensing; recruitment; unionization; and survival of the field. Excerpts from studies are presented to emphasize minimal training of paraprofessionals in relation to the extensive service they provide. A forecast is made indicating that community colleges will no longer play a major role in training due to fiscal pressure. Described are the following parent-initiated programs: Focus on Children, (Jonesboro, Arkansas); the Philadelphia Association for Retarded Children, (Pennsylvania); the North Orange County Regional Occupational Program, (California); and the Parsons-Labette Program, (Parsons, Kansas). Licensing is said to have variable support from national organizations such as the National Education Association, but strong backing from trainers, post-secondary institutions, and state agencies. The approaches of California and Louisiana in moving toward a statewide model are discussed. New sources of aides such as teachers in training are proposed, and recommendations for their recruitment are given. Among the union issues briefly reviewed are seniority, concern of unions for other groups, training, and unionism versus professionalism. A summary states that budget cuts and reduced federal funding are threats to survival of the field and that training in vocational tracks may aid field retention. (MC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

1310

ED227608

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

LOOKING AHEAD:
ISSUES FACING SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONALS IN THE 1980s

by

George R. Kaplan

LOOKING AHEAD:

ISSUES FACING SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONALS IN THE 1980s

by

George R. Kaplan

This paper is one of a series of monographs and reports, available from the National Resource Center for Paraprofessional in Special Education, that address issues concerning the training and utilization of paraprofessionals working in public school conditions. For more information about these reports and other services available through the Center contact: Anna Lou Pickett, Center for Advanced Study in Education, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036.

This report was prepared as part of work and activities supported by the Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U.S. Department of Education (Grant No. 02-G007901330). The material contained in this paper does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Special Education Programs and no official endorsement by them should be inferred.

Case No. 05-82
1982

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	i
ARE PARAPROFESSIONALS COST EFFECTIVE	1
COLLABORATION, INDEPENDENCE, AND BOTH	10
Focus on Children, Inc.	13
The Philadelphia Association for Retarded Citizens	17
NOCROP of Orange County	22
Collaborating in Kansas	25
POLISHING THE ROUGH DIAMOND: THE ISSUES OF LICENSING	33
AIDES AND STATE POLICY	44
Starting Out In California	45
Moving Mountains in Louisiana	51
RECRUITMENT: NEW PEOPLE IN NEW ROLES	58
UNIONS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS	73
PROSPERITY, SURVIVAL, OR DISASTER	81
LADDERS, LATTICES, AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES	88

PREFACE

The paraprofessional looms large in the future of special education. In numerical growth and ever-expanding roles, this often overlooked educator has become one of the key figures in the era that began with the first successful court cases on behalf of children with disabilities only a decade or so ago. Seldom do these exceptional children pass their days in school without extended, often highly personal, contact with an aide. To many children, paraprofessional and teacher are simply two very important and fully interchangeable adults.

Yet we still know far too little about this key character's motivation, status, working conditions, and level of preparation for a demanding, often emotionally wrenching, daily task. We know that at least 90 percent of the 100,000-plus instructional aides in our public schools are women with high-school educations who both desire and need training to equip them to do their jobs better. And we have a pretty accurate count of how few of them have been able to improve their qualifications through courses, workshops, training programs, or similar means.

Training is, regrettably, not the only problem that besets special education aides. Of equal, perhaps greater, status are several more fundamental matters that touch the most sensitive chords in their working lives. At their core is the perpetual quest for recognition and professional legitimacy. For paraprofessionals remain one of education's stepchildren. Indispensable though they have become, they are a public policy afterthought, an unrecognized and neglected part of education. They have few spokespersons and occupy no prominent positions on the agendas of education's decision-makers.

How, then, can this unorganized and politically impotent segment of special education become a better qualified, more widely accepted force in its own world?

In the chapters that follow, George R. Kaplan analyzes some of the issues and tactics that are emerging in the early 1980's and the ways in which some of the nation's more imaginative trainers and advocates are approaching the many problems that beset special education's aides. This examination is the third in a series that began with a description of the world of paraprofessionals ("The Vital Link") and continued with a discussion of training ("Special Needs, Special People"). This document takes a close look at a half-dozen subjects that directly affect the future of special education paraprofessionals: their cost effectiveness, some effective but unconventional programs, the question of licensing, the role of the state, issues in recruitment, and some implications of unionization. Not all of these subjects have immediate relevance to all trainers and paraprofessionals. Without some sense of their place and the state of their scene, however, those who concern themselves with the betterment of the aides, and of the children they serve, may be short-changing themselves and their cause.

This is the third year of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education. We are proud to offer publications such as this and to serve special education aides throughout the country.

Anna Lou Pickett, Director
National Resource Center for
Paraprofessionals in Special Education
March 1982

ARE PARAPROFESSIONALS COST EFFECTIVE?

Of course they are! They cost practically nothing, and they work hard. They help teachers to use their time better. They stay in the same job, usually uncomplainingly, for years, always grateful for small favors. Many, probably a majority, don't even get minimal fringe benefits such as paid vacations, medical insurance, or retirement plans, and they do a million and one things around a school. If you're having budgetary problems, you can let them go without sympathy strikes or political hassles because they're rarely organized. In fact, they're sort of like the comic strip character, the shmoo, which provided for all human wants and, having met them, joyously danced into the final kingdom.

These are the quick answers, the ones that cost-conscious school principals might blurt out in response to a school board member's inquiry about the cost effectiveness of special education aides. Upon reflection, the principal would probably muster several more seemingly unarguable points, like these:

- Inexpensive and yet beneficial as they are now, paraprofessionals become even more cost effective as they learn by doing.
- It costs almost nothing to recruit aides, and formal training is a luxury most neither expect nor receive. They go right to work.
- Many aides will work on temporary or part-time basis. They tend to be exceptionally punctual and dependable.
- They almost never cause administrative grief. Never entirely sure of their jobs, they are seldom militant or demanding.
- In some areas of the country, especially middle- and high-income suburban counties like Santa Clara, (California), Westchester (New York), and Montgomery (Maryland), they are more than merely cost effective.

> They may be the educational bargain of the decade. With college degrees, specialized preparation, and valid teaching certificates, some aides are egregiously overqualified. Yet, for reasons of their own, many are generally content to work for very low wages and few benefits.

All well and good, but what about the numbers? Exactly how much, for example, does a five-aide complement save during the year in a typical ten-classroom school building? Does a child with a handicapping condition develop and learn better or faster because a paraprofessional is there to help? If so, how much better or faster? How cost effective for the teacher is the time the the aide spends with her in working as part of the instructional team, performing clerical tasks, or collecting data? Isn't the cost of the aide, however minor it may appear to be, an expense that didn't exist in, say 1961? Do aides help institutionalized children return home more rapidly, thereby saving the state heavy in-patient costs, or do they contribute to inflated expectations?

Dozens of questions like these clamor for the serious analysis that educational researchers have thus far not undertaken. The examination would be heavily time-consuming, and data are nearly impossible to find. Besides, this is not a field for professional payoff with courses waiting to be taught on the savings, or logistical leeway, that aides represent. Scholars at no more than a half-dozen independent research centers and universities (Yale, Indiana, Nebraska, Washington, Tennessee, City University of New York) have even examined aides as a separate force in any social field, let alone special education. The only known discussions of their possible effectiveness in purely economic terms focus on metal health paraprofessionals who, fortuitously, have several characteristics in common with special education aides.

Findings in this field may have some relevance, especially a six-year study of the economic effect of the substantial use of paraprofessionals in community mental health centers which revealed, according to Mary Davis Hall, the chief investigator for a University of Washington-based project,that:

- Total operating costs for paraprofessional-dominated centers were $165 per hour in contrast to professionally oriented centers that registered totals of $202 and $281. The annual operating cost per full-time worker in a paraprofessional-dominated unit was $10,675 compared to $17,435 and $24,359 in centers dominated by medical personnel.
- In terms of "client outcome measures," the "services which account for being the most effective in reducing state hospital first admissions and patient movement index rates," paraprofessionals were also the most effective, registering nine and 13 percent more home visits than professionally and medically dominated staffs. Similarly, they performed 17 and 23 percent more outreach services than the professional and medical groups.

Out of facts like these, the nobility of the paraprofessional cause, and a strong hope throughout special education that the deployment of aides can be proven to be economical has come a collective sense that cost is somehow not important. There is an understandable assumption that a facet of special education that is as inexpensive and effective as the proper use of paraprofessionals can only be an economical one. It may be that and more, but the Washington study and others like it offer little direct support.

Community mental health centers (CMHC), few of which are even 20 years old, are not schools populated by children with both physical and mental handicapping conditions nor are the similarities at all compelling. The bases of data upon which to begin comparisons are apples and cats, or dogs and oranges. The main resemblances are: (1) schools and CMHC's are both social institutions, (2) their populations require special assistance, and (3) both employ paraprofessionals. Each of these three decomposes quickly under close scrutiny.

Yet the impression persists, even in a time of massive changes in the body of the human services, that paraprofessionalism is destined to grow steadily, mainly because it is inexpensive, just, and right. There are absolutely no verifiable facts in 1982 as to whether, in fact, aides are cost effective. Regrettably, moreover, many of the arguments in the paraprofessional case can be flipped over and used to opposite effect. A few examples:

- The presence of a competent adult helper surely enables the teacher to attack the heavy new loads of paper work that have engulfed her for several years, meet more often with parents, and see to her own training. If the signals of the early 1980's are at all accurate, however, a relaxation of standards in these matters may become widespread. Teachers may give more of their day to old-fashioned classroom teaching, and some paraprofessionals may be relegated to menial chores or simply fired. A preliminary survey of 85 school districts by the National School Boards Association in 1981 indicated that 57 percent intended to release school staff members and that aides were near the top of the hit list.

- Inexpensive and cost effective though they may seem to be, the aides are a new force in the schools (although not, as cottage parents or developmental workers, in residential facilities that need them 24 hours a day) and, therefore, a new cost. New categories are often the easiest to reduce or eliminate, usually because they haven't had time to demonstrate their full value or to develop single-interest political support groups -- the plague and redemption of many causes in public life.
- The total lack of information about the real costs of aides, at a time of budgetary crisis for human services at every jurisdictional level, forces their advocates to rely on affective, often highly emotional, justifications. These, in the jargon of budgetary agencies, "simply won't wash when we need hard data."
- That untrained adult may be competent and caring, but she can probably get a job somewhere else, most likely a better-paying one for which she may be more honestly qualified.
- As the aides achieve greater acceptance in their system, they become likelier targets for recruitment into unions. Their new affiliation, with its attendant benefits and status for members, usually also increases short-term outlays for employing organizations. It is paradoxical, and perhaps unfair, that a constructive path to a long-overdue better deal for paraprofessionals should also cost more and even sow doubts about their cost effectiveness.

To dwell on the barriers to assessing whether aides do or don't save dollars is to rehash much of the frustrating debate in educational quarters over whether an effective teacher saves money for the community. Does the academic performance of the students offer the best proof? Is the effective teacher the one who instills desirable values and treats academic subjects routinely? What about student-teacher ratios?

If such questions are endless and strike at the heart of schooling itself, which they are and do, is there any honorable way to determine the precise efficacy of special education paraprofessionals in terms of dollars and cents? No, there isn't, nor can there be. It is surely possible to chart the progress of children with disabling conditions--indeed, it is now mandatory to do so everywhere-- and to make some cautious judgments on the impact of finite expenditures for education and therapy. But to attempt to isolate and assess the economic influence of the lowest ranking instructional agent in a child's emotional, physical, and/or intellectual development would probably be futile and foolish. It is neither, however, to suggest that only scientifically valid means of measurement can reveal the economic truths about paraprofessionals.

In the Fall of 1980 edition of "Educational Programs That Work" (Special Education) the National Diffusion Network (NDN) of the U.S. Department of Education reported on a seven-year federally funded "pilot project utilizing supportive personnel using behavior modification techniques with articulatory disordered children", a description NDN simplified to "a model for expanding speech therapy delivery through training of paraprofessionals as communication aides." The self-explanatory description of this project, which was based in Burlington, Iowa:

"The basic aim is to release clinicians from minor problems so that they are able to spend more time with children with severe speech problems. Communication aides are hired and trained to run operant programs with K-12 children with minor articulation problems under the direct supervision of a speech clinician. The professional clinicians train the aides, perform all diagnostic testing, determine prescriptions, and make all therapy decisions. If the problem is mild, such as simple lisping, sound distortion, or omission, the child is turned over to an aide. Aides work with 9-14 students for 20-30 minutes each.

"Initial aide training takes two days, followed by a week of work with a clinician. The aides handle an average of 70 students per year.

"Before the project began, it cost about $120 to give each student the speech assistance he or she needed. The use of aides has cut this figure in half. Formerly, clinicians spent 85% of their time in group speech sessions and only 15% in individual therapy sessions. Two years after the project started, these figures were almost reversed, with 83% of the treatment in individual therapy and 17% in group."

After one year of the project, 46 percent of the "moderately disordered" children were dismissed from therapy. In the previous, pre-project, 23 percent were eligible for release. In 1973 dollars, each aide cost $5,500, a figure that included training, salary, and materials for 70 children.

These are presumably the kinds of data that impress budget examiners. The project was undeniably cost effective, if only because it halved the costs of services per student. It went further, though, as so many endeavors of this type have done. It released much higher paid professionals, the speech clinicians, for the specialized and more demanding work for which their years of training and experience had equipped them. In assisting students with supposedly minor problems, the paraprofessionals may well have helped to liberate some talented children and young adults from the serious psychological inhibitions their poor speech had caused.

It is not far-fetched to speculate that some of these children who would have drifted into mediocrity or heavy dependency will become exceptionally productive citizens. Nor was this cost-effective effort limited to the single site at which it occurred. Members of the project's staff declared their availability to conduct "out-of-state awareness meetings" and, in general, to spur adoption of the inexpensive paraprofessional-centered system wherever there was a need.

This is admittedly a clean case, one that attracted national attention as an exemplary program. It did its job well and inexpensively, and potential users of its expertise doubtless saved both anguish and hard-won financial support by learning from it. At one admittedly rudimenatry level, too, there are actual dollar-and-cent economies for the skeptical.

As so frequently happens in discussions of fruitful endeavors in special education, this example came from one of the field's difficult but nonetheless success-prone areas, speech therapy. At risk of cynicism, it is only fair to point out that, while all handicapping conditions can inflict incalculable distress to bearer, family, school, and workplace, the potential for measuring success, as compared to achieving it, usually lies in fields such as speech, reading or hearing. The research is advanced, the children are often "normal" except for the relatively low-level disability, and there are plenty of competent practitioners at all strata of instruction and therapy. Success is frequent and often downright cheap.

But try to extract cost data from special education for children with severe, multiple, profound disabilities. Perhaps an especially adventurous financial analyst could find something of economic interest in the story of a

seriously retarded state hospital resident who manages somehow to spend 15-20 hours a week in a sheltered workshop producing marketable products. Is this cost effectiveness? Or is it a saga of courage and tenacious dedication that is immune to quantification?

Whatever the future of the special education paraprofessional in American education, the decisive questions should not be primarily, or even secondarily, economic. If an objective of special education is to help children with disabling conditions to function effectively in a society that may never fully accept them, the peak priority should be to help them to equip themselves with skills, attitudes, and competencies that will make them useful citizens. Cost effectiveness has its place, even in special education, but it cannot be the central determinant of public policy in the human services.

COLLABORATION, INDEPENDENCE, AND BOTH

In an address to the 1981 convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, retiring Association President Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr. called the two-year institutions "People's Colleges" or "Democracy's Colleges" and cited cases where, among literally thousands of similar instances, they have offered midnight courses, met whatever needs industry levied, and taught reading because, in the words of the President of Bunker Hill Community College in Massachusetts, "...what else could we do?" Just about anything, it seems.

This is an accurate depiction of the flexibility and responsiveness of most of those remarkable two-year cornucopias of educational services to individuals, communities and vocational fields. An earlier report in this series, "Special Needs, Special People" (1980), called the community college the natural habitat for training paraprofessionals of all kinds. Two years later, they remain the best-equipped and most finely attuned of any of the main dispensers of instruction for paraprofessionals working with exceptional children.

It is less clear that they will choose to remain a central force in the field. Adaptable and sensitive though they usually are in both operating mode and educational milieu, their prosperity depends almost entirely on the readiness of elected public bodies such as state legislatures or agencies of local governnance to appropriate large amounts of public money. Although they respond readily to the command of local employers (Larry Blake, who heads North Carolina's community colleges, says "If industry needs people trained in certain ways, we will do it"), some two-year colleges are less enthusiastic about initiating programs that do not appear to have easily discernible pay-off. It is one thing to provide electronics technicians for well-paying positions in a new high-technology plant that promises to revitilize a suffering community's economic life. It is quite another to prepare low-income women to work at minimum wage in a public school that ostensibly educates tomorrow's non-producers. Besides, applied science, or the community college's approximation of it, is something

of a prestige-bearer for the institution. It is forward-looking, dynamic, part of the nation's real future. One line of reasoning goes: There is only so much an aide can learn, but the world of technology is infinite and varied.

These are not generally held attitudes, but they are beginning to appear as the once lofty place of the human services in public policy agendas comes into question. Community colleges are not immune to these pressures. Like public institutions everywhere, they are tightening their collective belts and setting more realistic goals. Where they might have been willing to create a program for "human services techinicians" or "mental health aides" or "instructional assistants" a year or two earlier in the certain conviction that it would attract respectable attendance, by the early 1980s they were taking a different kind of look at new curricula. They needed to know several things:

- Who would be paying for the instruction? In previous incarnations and in other places, there was usually some loose federal money to cover some of the costs. Would there be any now?
- Did sponsoring institutions--school systems, residential facilities, day care centers, all of them reeling from budgetary cuts--have any resources or would they try, as they had so often done, to work out some kind of in-kind, internship, or "swap" arrangement? The ingenuity of such schemes is often a bureaucratic wonder. But they don't actually put dollars in the till, a key fact of life when hard cash is in short supply.
- What about the aides themselves? Can they or would they contribute to the cost of their training? Usually not, although there are some exceptions.
- Once started, how long would such a specialty last? It is axiomatic that the inservice development of staff is one of the worthiest endeavors ever to occupy one of the lowest priorities in elementary and secondary education. It exists, but it has never really caught on. The severely

limited local funds that surface from time to time are a predictable casualty of any reduction in public spending.

This semi-projection may be undeservedly pessimistic, and it is possibly too hard on the two-year colleges. It is meant only to point out that they, like the public causes they serve, are as vulnerable to fiscal pressures as anyone else and that they will surely have to reassess their role as trainers of special education paraprofessionals.

If the economic settings are changing, new or different forms, agencies and approaches must inevitably come into play. But this assumption tells only part of the story, for some of those have already appeared alongside of community colleges and various in-house systems in the schools. A few represent ad hoc combinations of existing agencies. Some, like Focus on Children, Inc. of Jonesboro, Arkansas, are relatively new, independent, and highly individualized, often the products of one person's tenacity or ambition or both. Others, like the Philadelphia Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC), have been in the business of preparing paraprofessionals since it began. Literally, PARC was the first agency in the United States to train aides to work with people with handicapping conditions. It is still at it.

Focus on Children and PARC are at opposite, yet connected ends of the spectrum of free-standing training organizations. Their undergirding premises--that exceptional children and those who serve them deserve exceptional help and that the organizations of government may not be fitted to those needs--are similar, but they part company from that point on. Focus on Children, Inc. is small, new, and of uncertain future, and PARC, while no less vulnerable to financial tribulations than any public service agency, has been imbedded in the life of one of the country's largest cities for more than a generation. Neither is wedded to courses or credentials. These, they believe, tend to clutter the landscape and may impede rather than assist the trainee. And both, or variations of them, may offer a solid hope for the field of training special education paraprofessionals.

Focus on Children, Inc.

When Barbara Semrau, an experienced trainer of teachers and paraprofessionals, came to Jonesboro in the northeastern corner of Arkansas from North Carolina in the late 1970s, she encountered a crazy-quilt pattern of views on and approaches to providing services to children with disabilities. With both P.L. 94-142 and a strong state law on the books, Arkansas was ostensibly poised to move smoothly into the era of well-endowed enlightenment that had dawned elsewhere in the country. By most measures of economic progress, however, the state rests near the bottom in the nation, providing the lowest per pupil support for public education. Describing themselves as woefully underpaid, the state's teachers had in effect clamped a lien on any new general funds that might become available. Favorable legislation and unarguable need notwithstanding, prospects for nourishing a cause as far down the list of public priorities as training for special education aides were somewhere between gloomy and indifferent.

Focus on Children did not come charging to the rescue, but it did aim a spotlight of respectable intensity on some of Arkansas' problems in special education. Seemingly held together itself with scotch tape, baling wire, and a touch of genius in locating financial support, it is not destined to occupy plush quarters in the state house or in a Little Rock high-rise office building. It is a temporary organization in the classic sense in which the leaders in organizational development employ the team. Mostly, it responds to a cluster of needs by defining a problem, assembling expertise, and working to address the needs, and then, ideally, moving along to others or even disbanding. Technically and officially, it is "a non-profit corporation whose specific objectives are the provision of in-service training, technical assistance, and curriculum materials to teachers working with handicapped students." Physically, it is an independent six-to-ten person helping agency with headquarters in a small building off a secondary road a mile or two from downtown Jonesboro, a city of 30,000 persons which is the home of Arkansas State University. Despite this proximity,

and Semrau's personal ties to ASU, Focus remains free of organizational connections to the university and, remarkably, to the state education agency. Nor does it have any formal links to the school systems and agencies it assists.

In 1981 Focus on Children was serving diverse populations with various demands that arose from their poverty, lack of education, or handicapping conditions. One of its largest, but still modest, efforts was an endeavor to prepare 70 aides at seven sites throughout the state, meeting once a week over a 15-week stretch to learn the paraprofessional's craft. With the bulk of the funding provided through the governor's office by a grant from CETA (the U.S. Department of Labor-sponsored Comprehensive Employment and Training Act), the Focus program located CETA-eligible persons for training and, in ideal situations, permanent placement. It was not a garden variety inservice training endeavor, but, rather, a modernized version of the manpower (now humanpower) programs that have been with us, in one form or another, since the depression of the 1930s. Almost none of the 70 aides were working in schools when the grant began. They came from areas of high unemployment, although most were of rural rather than urban origins. About half were black, most were unmarried while supporting families, and their average age was 30. Most had poor employment histories in dead-end jobs and had, therefore, developed limited, if any, skills that would persuade anyone to hire them. With few exceptions, however, these were people of intelligence and creativity who richly deserved a shot at something better.

The Focus training regimen is simple and direct. Staff members go to the schools, once a week per school for 15 weeks, and check back with and on the teacher. The aides get their training in groups of 10-15 and receive released time from their 30-hour, minimum wage, CETA-supported posts in schools, Head Start programs, "colonies", and similar milieux. The training, including observation by Focus staff members, covers 48 hours. It is a kind of turnkey process in which Focus on Children does everything. It arranges the on-the-job placement of aides, trains them, and performs the necessary paper work. Uniquely

among independent organizations, it provides authoritative materials, notably its own attractive "Why Not Competence?", a guide for training special education paraprofessionals, and an accompanying illustrated 222-page workbook called "The Teacher Aide is Special." Both are among the best materials in the field in the nation and would comfortably meet virtually any criteria for training trainers and aides. They are visually agreeable, largely free of arcane vocabulary, and neither condescending nor pretentious.

The policy issue of CETA's uncertain future and that of ambitious national programs like it can understandably confuse discussion of the virtues of temporary organizations like Focus on Children. The question of survival, after all, surely precedes leisurely analysis of what it all means. But Focus does offer lessons that reach beyond the matter of federal support, lessons that may deserve the attention of potentially frustrated service-providers whose professional outlooks have been conditioned largely by the behavior of systems of large government. A few of the more apparent ones:

- An unaffiliated, self-standing organization has flexibility, the capacity to respond quickly to urgent needs, and only those administrative costs and obligations it imposes upon itself.
- It can appeal for support to any source for any purpose. Its solicitations can be non-political in every sense of the word or as political as its leadership wants them to be.
- As Focus on Children has demonstrated, it can develop, produce and test usable materials immediately as part of the services it furnishes. No protracted hassles with superiors or editorial boards; if the trainers and trainees want to employ them, they can simply go ahead and do it.
- The independent can be part of any kind of relationship: expert contracted resource for one or more school systems or residential facilities, member of a consortium of groups with complementary

strengths, instigator of work by others, part-time or adjunct staff--or any combination of these and others.

- The temporary organization can locate need and define it on its own terms. Focus found a spotty picture of paraprofessional training in Arkansas. It also found people of good will and possible talent who needed jobs and training. Some of the governor's CETA resources were at hand. Outcome: a program that combined needs and served good causes.

This is an idealized recounting. It happened something like this in Arkansas, but the intelligence and high purpose of Focus's leadership are not enough. To make a Focus-like endeavor work requires several additional ingredients that, for all of their other virtues, trainers do not always possess. With limited exceptions, they are, by and large, products of secure public (or nearly public) institutions like school systems, state institutions or agencies, or universities. None of these really nurture such requisite attributes as these:

- Running a service-providing, trouble-shooting organization requires a thoroughly entrepreneurial point of view. Civil servants do not know much about meeting payrolls, borrowing money, or taking risks. Yet these are among the most basic elements of an independent.
- The proprietors must be true believers who recognize that they may never achieve personal prosperity. On the other hand, they may get to do things that no large bureaucracy would ever permit. And they report only to those who hire them!
- Professional credibility is a sine qua non. Entrepreneurship is heady. It is also foolhardy in a field like special education where demands are precise, competition is heavy, and the stakes are very high.

- Finally, it would make no sense for even the field's best people to consider going independent without knowing how to find financial support--in creative, unconventional ways. It belabors the obvious to build on the political messages of the 1980s. Less obvious to practitioners in human services may be the still-valid messages that we inhabit a rich country and that there is usually support somewhere for things that matter.

The Philadelphia Association for Retarded Citizens

Some of the same attributes characterize PARC, a solidly based, multi-purpose, not-for-profit agency that, to quote Executive Director E.A. Gentile, "can scare and help at the same time." Both aggressive and altruistic, PARC, according to its 1980 materials, "...during its 31 year history, has provided many firsts in Philadelphia, and even in this country." The firsts include, among other things, a developmental center for mentally retarded children and adults, a daily program for severely retarded adults, and programs for handicapped infants and toddlers which it encouraged 12 other agencies in Philadelphia to replicate. Central to all of its work is its role in "...offering its free advocacy services to all mentally retarded individuals and their families in Philadelphia." And much more.

In 1971, possibly before anyone else in the country, PARC got into the business of training special education aides: a group of six 19-year-old youths who were to work in a program of "infant stimulation" with 45-50 babies at a local church. Out of this experience came a decision to study and evaluate the needs of paraprofessionals. The state provided funding, and PARC developed a training program complete with research modules and a fully inter-disciplinary design. The PARC system uses teams of special educators, psychologists, parents, and an array of other available people such as doctors (often pediatricians), social workers, and lawyers. Like Focus on Children, it professes to respect

much of the work in its field, but it produces its own training materials, because they can be attuned to local conditions and because, frankly, PARC wanted to write them.

At the same time that it is suing the school system -- PARC is strongly inclined to litigation -- and otherwise representing Philadelphia's consumers with handicapping conditions, PARC is offering a distinctive eight-phase program to train both paraprofessionals and their trainers. Starting with the field of developmental disability in 1975, PARC's trainers quickly demonstrated that they could meet virtually any reasonable requirement in or near special education. Their training teams travel throughout the middle Atlantic region and into the South with a 13-day core program that covers human development, child assessment, parent involvement, communication, etiologies of developmental disabilities, health management, curriculum, and service delivery. All of this is under the aegis of PARC's Personnel Preparation Program, which is headed by Dr. Marilyn J. Byer. The 13 days are flexible. They may span a school year or be offered, depending on the contractor's demands, over a much shorter stretch.

The pluses and minuses of PARC's independent status are slightly different from those of the much younger Focus on Children in Arkansas. A half-continent away, PARC's staff sees these advantages in their agency's ability to control its own life:

- First, by a wide margin, is its ability to sue the public schools. PARC is always ready to go to court in a good cause, according to staff attorney James Everett. It maintains extensive files, operates a hot line, and is otherwise a thorn in the side of any person or agency that seems to be shortchanging or discriminating against children with handicaps.
- It represents parents and their children, a mission that governmental organizations, however sympathetic they may be, simply cannot perform.

- With low overhead expenses of around ten percent, PARC can move rapidly, economically, and flexibly into any situation within its scope.
- It can hire and fire as needs dictate. It can tap Philadelphia's deep reservoir of volunteer talent.
- Unburdened by an official position, PARC can convene remarkably diverse groups to advise, address issues that violate conventional disciplinary boundaries, or act quickly in rapidly-breaking crisis.

It has taken nearly a third of a century to accumulate these assets. They are not transferable. They belong to PARC. But the experience they represent, especially in raising funds, is not exclusive. It could prove applicable to many organizations in many settings.

Like everyone else in this profession, PARC has had lean times. One of the many lessons it has learned from them is to try to diversify sources of financial backing. It is bad business to center an organization's fund-raising on one wellspring, because the grantee inevitably acquires some of the aura and values of the grantor, sometimes to the point of becoming its creature. Too, such dependence separates it from other sources that may be part of the mainstream of the field. Thus, PARC seeks, and usually gets support from a variety of places, Although the professional staff maintains a "ready" file of material for potential funders--indeed, it overlooks no opportunity to compete for federal, state, city, and foundation monies that would support PARC's mission--this traditional route is not the only one PARC travels. There are PARC benefactors who occasionally provide heavy injections, and 2,000 members pay $10 a year for PARC membership. The 700-plus volunteers, called PARC Aides, who raise funds for the organization are well-organized, well-connected to the city's sources of corporate and industrial power, and single-minded in their quest for dollars for PARC. As a fully accepted part of the city's extensive system of private philanthropy, PARC benefits from various social events. It can, and does, charge for many of its services, a notion that had enjoyed little popularity in an era of federal largesse.

Diversification, PARC has learned, transcends sources of dollars. It also means involving different people in different kinds of work--the more the merrier. There are advisory boards and committees galore, all staffed by volunteers and all busily engaged in easing PARC's work. In sum, PARC knows its community and understands how it orders its life.

The PARC story appears at first glance to apply only to the venerable city in which it has unfolded since the early 1950s. Yet, like the saga of Focus on Children, it contains wisdom for anyone who is willing to sample the irritations and satisfactions of independent organizational existence as a vehicle for training aides.

- The experience of both PARC and Focus on Children, as well as the handful of other independents in this business, illustrates clearly that anyone considering going down this path must possess courage, a keen intelligence in money matters, imagination, a penchant for risk-taking, and a disdain for personal economic security.
- Training special education paraprofessionals is too weak a base for any free-standing or self-supporting agency. It must be part of a larger profile of activities that are consistent with the training. This implies that the founder(s) of a non-profit organizations must have, or have excellent access to, talents in related fields.
- The greater the success of such an organization, the larger it becomes. The temptation to build empires is often unquenchable, even in the most altruistic deliverer of human services. To become large is to risk losing the advantages of ready response, flexibility, low overhead, and general attractiveness to funders.

The 1980s may not be the most promising decade of the century for the human services, especially for those that depend solely on funding from government agencies. Pressures on public treasuries are overwhelming. If there is an alternative -- and there may well not be one -- it may require entrepreneurial talents that seldom reveal themselves in public agencies. Neither PARC nor Focus on Children shuns support from government; indeed, they would be hardpressed to do their work without it. But they have no qualms about charting different courses; in finding support, running their own show, and building different kinds of ties. The risks are many, but so are the rewards.

NOCROP of Orange County

In 1963, the California legislature called for school districts to extend and expand vocational education for high school students and adults. One of the products of this legislative decision was the North Orange County Regional Occupational Program (NOCROP), a part of a network of self-standing umbrella organizations that link people to careers and jobs by providing course work, work-study or intern-type placements, and sound advice about jobs and careers. The largest of the state's 64 Regional Occupational Programs, the ten-year-old NOCROP covers five high school districts with 24 schools providing students for some 130 classes in 64 fields. It does what no single high school can do: cover a tremendous range of fields, survey a large area for job possibilities (and offer training only after ascertaining that there are opportunities for employment in the fields in which it instructs), and conduct on-site classes at more than 50 businesses. Among its other virtues, NOCROP helps to keep unemployment down by developing a close fit between student, training, and jobs.

Nowhere is the fit more comfortable than in the specialty called "special education assistant," part of a larger NOCROP grouping of "Education/Child Related Occupations," which prepares students for training and, in many cases, permanent placement in such aide-level positions as regular classroom aide, media aide, perceptual motor training assistant, and infant/toddler or preschool-child care assistant. Although adults participate in this program, as they do in all of NOCROP's vocational fields, which range from auto body repair through the building trades occupations to printing and manufacturing, the six-year-old "special education assistant" program is distinctive because it:

- makes aides out of high school students, a source of humanpower that has been largely overlooked in this field;
- offers them on-the-job training that can inform their decisions about careers;
- provides a wide variety of training placements and ties to related programs; and
- does not demand a long-term commitment. If this line of work does not suit a participant, she or he may, under NOCROP's "open entry, open exit" process, leave at any time.

In 1981, there were 50 high school students in the program. Most had entered it after talking with a counselor (usually a "career guidance specialist" with a connection to NOCROP) in their schools. Some of the more gifted and purposeful were clearly headed for four-year colleges to prepare for careers in education or other human services and believed, correctly, that this early "hands on" experience would be useful. Most of the rest, however, were from the great middle of their school classes. Half would probably head for college, and the others would enter the job market. For two periods daily, they report to a designated school or special facility where they perform typical aide-type chores: assisting in a sheltered workshop, helping in the classroom, tutoring, working in an activities center. The ROP provides monthly on-site workshops in such pertinent areas as the nature of handicapping conditions, teaching methods, behavior management, or task analysis.

Of the 50 persons in the program during the 1980-81 school year, Dr. Roger Cox of the NOCROP staff estimated that 15 would go into special education, some of them directly following high school. It is doubtful that they would have made such a choice without having had the first-hand experience, enthusiasm, and realistic expectations in a field that needs all three.

Although the NOCROP-high school connection appears to represent organizational layering through the imposition of yet another public agency between education and the workplace, it delivers qualified young people to a field that has a crying need for them. Few public programs of any type can match that achievement. There is no charge to schools and employers, and NOCROP, with its emphasis on training and placement, offers superb access to real, live jobs.

The NOCROP model embodies another, possibly more subtle, virtue that makes it an attractive alternative to more traditional training endeavors. As aides, the high schoolers are dealing with peers or with children only slightly younger than themselves--a factor that rarely exists in special education settings. With the barrier of age absent, communication between the aides and children with handicapping conditions is generally good. Too, the fledgling aides learn about the causes and effects of disability in ways that will make them advocates whether they stay in the field or not.

What NOCROP is doing in preparing special education aides is unarguably a boon to a field that has always occupied one of the lower priorities of educational policy-makers. To repeat its strengths is to belabor the obvious. Less evident, though, is an unintended by-product that may further becloud an already unclear picture. In identifying the preparation of future paraprofessionals as a vocational rather than sub-professional endeavor (NOCROP is completely vocational), the trainers in California may be contributing to a two-track outlook for special education aides: a kind of permanent beginning level for the post-NOCROP high school graduates, and a somewhat more elevated status for those with a two-year degree from a community college. Distinctions in the classroom are blurred in any case, and no one is destined to become rich from this kind of work.

Also, most career ladders and schemes for certification (neither of which category, however, is especially prevalent) make ample provision for differentiation and reward. The problem is that salaries of non-unionized aides (the overwhelming majority) and their responsibilities tend to reach the same levels in a year or two. After two years, the NOCROP graduate attains all the advantages that the A.A.-holding veteran may have worked a decade to achieve. As a recent high government official noted, "Life is not always fair."

Collaborating in Kansas

A trainer of paraprofessionals named Dennis Tucker views state authority as an assertive yet positive element in his work in Parsons, a conservative farming community in the southeastern corner of Kansas about 35 miles from Missouri, 25 from Oklahoma, and 130 straight south of Kansas City. Tucker's work conforms in all major details to an elaborate system of state control over the hiring, placement, training, and administrative life of special education paraprofessionals in his state. Properly applied, Tucker contends, strong state processes like those prescribed by the Kansas legislature and developed by the State Education Department of Special Education can act as a helpful lever at local levels. They need not be objects of intimidation or annoyance.

Kansas is the nation's pioneer state in spotlighting paraprofessionals as a central feature of its special education program. The state legislature's Special Education for Exceptional Children Act of 1974 defined a "special teacher" as either a certified teacher or "...a paraprofessional qualified to assist certified teachers in the instruction of exceptional children as determined by standards established by the state board and approved by the state board."

Almost unmatched elsewhere in the nation in its comprehensiveness and respect for teacher aides, the Kansas legislation defines the paraprofessional as "one-half full-time equivalent teacher" and stipulates literally dozens of conditions, definitions, and caveats that cover nearly every aspect of the paraprofessional's working life. The Kansas law and the state education agency's regulations to assure that it works are positively awesome. And the state's leaders in the field clearly intend to keep it that way.

The Kansas design leaves little to chance. In addition to the scrupulously official role it plays in setting or monitoring standards, it functions at an intensely human level. There are regular newsletters, a state organization of paraprofessionals, periodic bulletins, regional and state-wide training conferences -- and an esprit de corps among the aides that defies description anywhere else in the country. No national conference on paraprofessionals is complete without an informed and vocal group of aides from Kansas in full view. The legislature and Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) form a mutual admiration society on the subject of paraprofessionals. There is no other shoe to drop. The Kansas story deserves the praise it has received, almost without caveat. Its prescriptions are as valid in rural Parsons as in urban Wichita.

The Parsons segment of it demonstrates the flexibility of a good state process. The state's operational mode pays no serious attention to community colleges as a force in training aides because there is no state system of two-year institutions, and the KSDE provides most of the training in any case. Enter Parsons State Hospital, Labette Community College, and the Southeast Kansas Regional Education Service Center at nearby Girard, with which Unified School District 609 is affiliated.

Parsons State Hospital and Training Center is a residential center with 250 mentally retarded persons of whom the nearly 200 who are of school age are enrolled in the Special Purpose School, a progressive, research-oriented institution with a close look at the need for training the aides who constituted much of the instructional staff of the school. Newly revitalized and publicized nationally in the Wall Street Journal and on ABC television, Labette Community College had been a junior rather than community college. It offered a few sub-professional courses but concerned itself mainly with preparing its students for transfer to four-year institutions. And the Regional Service Center, with three major special education cooperatives reporting to it, was the higher educational authority to which the Special Purpose School was administratively accountable. Tucker works at the Center.

Links among the three were tenuous, even invisible, before Tucker, Labette President Jerry Gallentine, and the Parsons staff tackled the problem of training aides in 1979. Within a year Labette had created the state's first degree-granting program (A.A.S.--Associate in Administrative Services) for training paraprofessionals, Tucker had become an adjunct faculty member offering some of the key areas of instruction, and over 50 of the 300 paraprofessionals employed at the three cooperatives had become actively involved. With connections to nearby Pittsburgh State University and Kansas State University (Parsons is considered a University affiliated facility-UAF) and carrying the promise of bachelor's and even master's degrees for those students who wanted advancement beyond the two-year degree, the program is both rooted in its community and outwardly oriented to bigger things, if they want them, for the participants.

Bearing out Dennis Tucker's contention that an informed state role advances rather than inhibits training, the Parsons-Labette program is closely tied, both by legal necessity and the inclination of its developers, to the state's comprehensive plan for using and training paraprofessionals. It is primarily an inservice program for aides already at work rather than for potential newcomers to the field. The participants have already met the state's requirements at one of its three permit levels. These cover a scale from high school graduate with supplementary experience to experienced instructional paraprofessional with three years of experience and specified "inservice" or academic training equivalent to a two-year degree. The aides are on an agreed monthly salary and work schedule that delineates precisely what their conditions of work, employee benefits, and even their potential for advancement are to be. The training that Labette provides, as well as that with which the Special Purpose School and state education agency supplement it, is thus geared to improving every aspect of the paraprofessional's career.

The Parsons model is not a model of training or delivery for any region but that which it serves. But it does demonstrate how certain seemingly uncoordinated forces can coalesce to (1) meet the needs of a locally important social service, the hospital; (2) engage an institution of higher education in the affairs of a community it had not before served directly (it has also initiated programs in criminal justice, medical radiology, and "cowboy technology" -- training for performers in rodeos!); tie the local school district more closely to other agencies of human services; and (4) tap local talent for instructional resources of the state university system.

These are the larger outlines of the Parsons story. Some of the details or omissions, like Labette's action in waiving tuition and fees for employees of the Special Purpose School and the minimal of federal funds in the entire endeavor, are heartening auguries for this economical, low-key approach to training aides.

There are risks in accommodating to the heavy brand of the state on local affairs, and the imprint is even heavier in Kansas, notably in the complex area of the paraprofessionals' salaries, which come in substantial degree from the state budget. The requirements for accountability in a system in which state law appears to regulate nearly all local action can be difficult to meet. Any state's bureaucracy can be difficult to penetrate. Conditions in the capital are far different from those in a remote farm village. But the advantages of strong state involvement -- to Parsons, to the cause of paraprofessionals in the whole state, and to the larger field -- significantly outweigh the flaws, for these reasons:

- Paraprofessionals tend to get lost in budgetary shuffles. It is much more difficult for this to happen when they have strong representation in the state's laws.
- The admittedly prescriptive processes and requirements the state imposes may be a necessary evil in a world of finite specialization and administrative nit-picking. Like it or not, an aura of respectability, even of status, attaches to a field that has its own laws, conditions for employment and advancement, obligations for training, and specified responsibilities.

- The criteria that Kansas uses for aides in special education are sensible, up-to-date, and consonant with the state's missions in education, medical assistance, rehabilitation and licensing of personnel.
- The field is new, and the state has far better access than a small school district to what is happening and available elsewhere in the country.

The Parsons-Labette program will outlive many others, whatever their high purpose and quality. If strong state-level regulation can be both a controlling and liberating force on the one hand, lack of higher level supervision and support can sink a local effort on the other. In one large eastern city, a small federally supported, three-year program helped over 100 special education paraprofessionals to do their job better. The grant from Washington enabled 35 specialists in two specific areas of disability to receive training in ten workshops during the year. It was a no-credit, inservice program for which the aides received extra pay even though most of them preferred academic credit to a few extra dollars. Tucked away in a far corner of the city's school system, the project had no full-time staff, drew trainers from within the system, and had no connection with other inservice training in the schools. Nor did it have an identifiable source of professional backing, no high-level supervisor who took it under his or her protective wing. Control, if it existed at all beyond the project's own temporary devices, came from the school system's grants staff and was purely administrative and fiscal.

At several levels this enterprise did its job. It exposed 100 paraprofessionals to new information and ways of doing things. It generated enthusiasm and some, if probably temporary, team spirit among the aides. It affirmed a degree of concern by the school system for their professional welfare. But at other, possibly more fundamental, levels it fell short and may not have been worth the cost in administrative effort, frustration, and crossed purposes. There were several reasons for its failures:

- Although the acquisition of knowledge is of and by itself a wondrous thing, it happened in a vacuum. A small percentage of a city's aides took ten workshops and were paid to do it. Period.
- Potential participants could apply, but "the fix was in." Selections were made exclusively on the basis of seniority, a procedure that the school system was obliged to follow as part of its agreement with the union which represented the aides. A veteran aide on the verge of retirement had precedence over a younger, more eager one. This is not all bad, but it does affect the composition of the trainees.
- Teachers were not involved. This could be a particularly irritating factor when an already experienced paraprofessional returned to the classroom with new knowledge a much younger teacher did not possess.

- The training had nothing to do with professional advancement, which comes automatically and without regard to added professional qualifications of the aides.

There was not the slightest possibility that this training would continue without more help from Washington. Whatever its success, which the participants and faculty both judged to be considerable, the project was destined to be a single-shot, short-term affair. The city's school system had no master plan for training aides and has expended little effort in that direction. The state has other things on its mind. A promising start plunged a well-conceived design into a bureaucratic morass, where it quietly expired.

This will not happen in southeastern Kansas. There is no permanent dependence on funding from outside the state, and the Parsons program is not another well-intentioned but foredoomed effort to right historic wrongs at a single blow. It is the product of several dedicated but practical minds. It includes participants who want the training, not those who are simply assigned to it, and it taps the resources and talents of several widely separated but commonly concerned people and agencies. Even a Kansas cyclone could not halt its progress!

POLISHING THE ROUGH DIAMOND: THE ISSUES OF LICENSING

As education's stepchild, the paraprofessional can count on little support from the traditional bases of influence and authority in public policy. Unsung and underpaid, the teacher aide is often the last hired and first fired, especially in hard times. Across the country the paraprofessional has been clinging to a job that offers no recognition, uncertain rewards, and a sandy foundation upon which to build a career. That the field continues to attract some of education's most worthwhile workers and the gratitude of those it serves (who, however, cannot adequately express it) is no guarantee that it will prosper or even survive as fiscal retrenchment becomes a reality rather than a prospect.

This issue of survival slants discussion of the aide as provider of care and instruction to children with disabling conditions, especially when the aide is viewed as a potentially licensed practitioner in special education. If the whole field is in precarious health, one could ask, then shouldn't the main task be to look to its honorable continuation rather than to ways of complicating an already difficult life? Isn't it more sensible to hunker down and make sure that those in place can stay there under livable conditions? Why set new criteria and administrative conditions when the main question regarding paraprofessionals may be survival itself rather than status, instruments and advancement?

Tilted this way, the case for legitimatizing the special education aide -- through certification, credentialling, licensing, permits, or whatever the local label -- becomes nearly academic, or at best defeatist. But this school of thought ignores the precipitate expansion of an approach to care and institutional work that even the most hardened skeptic admits has enriched special education. Whether the number of aides contracts visibly or not (it may increase even in

the face of cutbacks) should not inhibit sensible discussion of the virtues and flaws of credentialling. There is merit, in fact, in exploiting a possible pause in growth to take a detached look at where the field stands on this vital issue.

In a paper reporting on a different matter, the National Center for the Study of Professions, located in Washington, D. C., offered three rationales for certification. Taken in a "surprise free" context-- that is, with no unanticipated intrusion such as the state of the economy or the perilous health of government-underwritten endeavors of any kind -- these rationales provide a weatherproof structure for licensing in almost any field in the human services.

1. Recognition

It is imperative "to document the competence of those who have had formal education or training as well as those who have not so that employers, merit system personnel, third party payers and others have a common basis of understanding of what workers are capable of doing and have done." The workers themselves deserve formal acknowledgment of their competence, too, both for personal satisfaction and in order to have access to jobs, equitable pay, and, if applicable, academic credit, regardless of how they attained their competence.

2. Reimbursement

Probably the most widely recognized shortcomings in the professional lives of aides are those of the inadequacy and unevenness of their pay checks. Without an organized way to match wages to training, experience, and performance, paraprofessionals may be doomed to remain at or near minimum levels. (And, therefore, not become recognized members of a service delivery team trained to provide improved services to persons with handicapping conditions.)

3. Job Access and Mobility

Aides in most fields remain mired in dead-end jobs. Unless they educate themselves out of the classification by becoming teachers, therapists, or social workers, for example, they are unlikely either to advance within it or to move into different sectors of it. A comprehensive licensing system would doubtless include explicit descriptions of differentiated levels of employment and of processes for mobility among them. Except in the rarest of cases, those are denied today's special education aides.

Closer to home, a federally-funded national corps of experts took a close look at how those questions affected special education aides. Again, the examining group, the National Task Force on Certification Procedures for Paraprofessionals in Exceptional Student Education, spotlighted views and viewpoints without regard to the political and economic vagaries. The ad hoc task force drew participation from every corner of the special education paraprofessional's world: professional associations, teachers' unions, trainers, universities, state agencies, the federal government, lobbies and advocacy groups, school administrators, and real, live paraprofessionals. It was thus more readily able to present informed but diverse opinions than to offer a single consolidated point of view.

The ramifications of credentialling are monumental. There are more than 15,000 school districts in 50 states, hundreds of residential facilities, and as many viewpoints as there are experts in the field. But there is also an astonishing degree of consensus. The Task Force went beyond the verities specified by the National Center for the Study of Professions to agree that certification:

- Gives legal protection by establishing "the legal parameters for the role that paraprofessionals may assume, as well as providing job security."
- Helps teachers and administrators by offering "some guarantee of quality in the educational services provided by paraprofessionals certified in special education on the staff."
- Allows "for cost-effective educational service delivery" by reducing "the time and expense of training required by the local and state education agencies .... as certified paraprofessionals would have met many performance criteria."
- Promotes the aides' competence in working with both children and adults.
- Would encourage job mobility "by encouraging reciprocity and uniformity in hiring practices, and equal opportunities for employment for paraprofessionals holding a certificate."
- Encourages differentiated staffing, which in turn "permits certified personnel to provide more individualized programming for handicapped students."
- Serves the field by defining core competencies aides must possess before working directly with children with handicapping conditions.

Like the granitic truths of the National Center for the Study of Professions, those rationales are, by and large, unexceptionable and unremarkable. What gives them more than routine credibility is that they are the product of a committee whose members presumably share the one basic purpose of providing the best possible educational opportunities

for exceptional children. But they part company on tactics, strategy, and the particular preoccupation of their own interest groups. The latter concern both stimulates and discourages progress toward credentialling. Like the resolution of any matter of disputable public policy, the creation of justifications and procedures for licensing becomes, in the final analysis, a process of negotiation, adjustment, and compromise.

The views of the interested parties are a pastiche of informed but often single-minded opinion on the subject. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), for example, backed the idea of research on the subject but asserted that the decision to support certification was for individual states to make and not a matter for determination at the national level. The main professional organization in special education, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), performed an informal check of five states and contributed a preliminary judgment to the Task Force that reinforced the NASDSE caution regarding state-by-state processes. A memorandum on the CEC survey pointed out that "states have a number of agencies involved with classification of paraprofessional positions." Lacking a common board to certify individuals for functions as teacher's aide or mental health technician, for example, states must arrive at their own processes. The CEC pointed out, too, that an over-supply of teachers in some areas such as college towns results in holders of bachelor's and master's degrees performing paraprofessional duties.

To the educators' professional organizations or unions, certification is a mixed blessing. In principle, neither oppose it, and both view it as a state rather than a national affair. There are considerable gaps, however, between theory and practice and, in important details, between the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the National Education Association (NEA).

The AFT's support is ambiguous. Recognizing the diversity of classification (and therefore of provisions of union contracts) from one school system to another, its representative on the Task Force opposed uniformity of job titles, levels, or pay grades, and was leery about applying new standards to new, low-income entrants to the field. If there are to be requirements, said the AFT's representative, then state and local governments must underwrite both paraprofessional programs and inservice training for participants in them. While explicitly opposed to applying new requirements to aides already in place in the schools, the AFT's representative would support an obligation that new recruits possess a high school education or its equivalent and the granting of "permanent certification" following accumulation of certain numbers of credits and/or years (preferably three) of experience. Unlike most other participants in the work of the ad hoc Task Force, the AFT's representative viewed the specification requiring special training as a local responsibility rather than as a product of state certification. Nowhere in the statement, however, is there explicit mention of two of the union's main concerns:

seniority and job security. It is a safe assumption that any certification-related policies or actions that threatened either would encounter the AFT's fervent opposition.

The NEA's principal concern, as stated in the Task Force's final report, is that any move toward certification of paraprofessionals should not result in the replacement of certified teachers. Although prepared to join in any study of how to establish high standards for aides, the NEA has not committed itself beyond a statement that "it is important that teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other educators in each state examine the appropriateness of certification for paraprofessionals." Whether the NEA would take a strong stand on any paraprofessional issue may be open to question. "Active" membership, which is for teachers and administrators only, is not open to aides, who must content themselves with "educational support membership," a category that includes custodians and other school employees but which confers most of the material advantages the teachers receive.

Strong backing for some kind of credentialing comes, almost without exception, from trainers, post-secondary institutions, and, predictably, state agencies that would apply the standards and administer, or at least regulate, the training. All agree that paraprofessionals require status, rewards, and access. As credentialled professionals themselves, most of the key people in this work respect the need for legitimacy and protection that credentialling or certification helps to provide. Most of them feel strongly that anything less than full certification could weaken the field and

possibly deprive it of the services of those who make it work.

Countervailing arguments deserve mention.

- The timing is wrong. The field does not figure to grow in the early 1980s; indeed, it may have to fight for its life. Why set up a visible new, specialized category of employee in the human services at a time when critics are looking for targets to shoot at? Whether the case is persuasive or not, some political realists with their ears to the ground offer the argument that special education is doing better than most of its peer programs in the schools and that expanding its reach in this way would draw unnecessary fire.
- Licensing legitimizes poor training. With new standards to meet, community colleges, independent training organizations, the schools themselves, and even state agencies would try for a piece of the action. They would all want to become trainers, whether competent or not for the job. Course titles could become more important than content. The institutions might "teach to the paper." The preparation of paraprofessionals could become so precisely differentiated from the inservice instruction of teachers that the fact that both are instructors could be overlooked. These fears need not materialize, of course, but the overriding one, that quality might suffer rather than flourish, may have credibility.

- "Grandparenting." Representatives of the AFT have expressed the caution that, guarantees notwithstanding, veteran aides already in the schools would feel pressure to measure up to the academic standards of their junior but credentialled peers. Whatever their competence and commitment, many of the older paraprofessionals are not book learners and do not test well. They could be harmed, both professionally and emotionally, by the extensive readjustment that an emphasis on acquiring a permit would cause.
- A class system will develop. A comprehensive process for credentialling nearly always features provisions for mobility, through career ladders and lattices, for the employees. It also contains very precise conditions they must meet before professional advancement may occur. The adoption of such provisions, which are the essence of licensing, could serve to discriminate against many of those already in the field.
- Unionization may be a counter-force. Aides in many locations are beginning to reap the considerable benefits of membership in unions. But no union is likely to consent readily to an externally imposed code that preempts the main elements of a union position in an honorable negotiation. If salary levels, job descriptions, schedules for advancement, and form and content of training are already specified in state processes for

credentialling, the union loses much of its leverage. It is not likely to accept this kind of life.

- The field might over-extend itself. The possibility exists that excessively trained, well credentialled aides would be an unintentional threat to insecure teachers and unsympathetic administrators, especially if they do not control the processes that enhance the paraprofessionals' status. The field could become a bit "uppity" at a time when moderation and modesty may be the order of the day. The point is delicate and possibly offensive, but it may have validity.
- Credentialling creates bureaucracy. Someone has to design, administer, fight for, revise, and otherwise look after any system of licensing. In some states, executive authority is already divided or in dispute among legimately concerned agencies. In others, legislatures and elected or appointed boards have primary control. Almost nowhere is the perfect system available or on the horizon. The issue of a new bureaucratic unit cuts two ways: it creates visible and therefore vulnerable government entities, or it adds to the work and therefore the staff and level of funding of existing ones; and it confers legitimacy on the field it regulates. Both are perfectly feasible developments. There is some question, though, as to their durability in the anti-bureaucratic decade of the 1980s.

- Authority is no longer nearby. With few exceptions, the regulation of the work lives of aides has been traditionally, and perhaps incorrectly, a matter for local control, with the aides at or near the scene whenever anything new or different was happening. Whether the imposition of state standards helps them or not, the assumption by the state of active responsibility in the field distances the aides from the points of decision-making that matter most to them. Also, aides are highly unlikely to develop the pressure groups and lobbies that other licensed professions can wheel into action in the state capital whenever necessary. They are not politically experienced and they have few resources. For all of their sterling virtues in a special education classroom, they are not among the most articulate representatives a state legislative committee is likely to encounter.

AIDES AND STATE POLICY

There are many well worn routes to truth and achievement in public policy. The cause of securing state-level legitimacy for paraprofessionals in special education will doubtless travel most of them. At various times in the short life of the paraprofessional movement, progress has come about because:

- A state legislator's disabled child came through a particularly harrowing time with the compassionate care of an aide.
- A governor sought unconventional but cost-effective ways of using a small cache of discretionary federal funds.
- A state department of education and a university-connected institute found common interests in action-oriented research on the benefits of training aides.
- A small federally funded resource center put state officials in touch with one another and provided both information and expert assistance.

The list is longer. Each item on it demonstrates, if nothing else, that no two sets of circumstances are identical. What works in one state may be a ticket to disaster in another. Cautious recommendation based on validated research may lead nowhere, but an odd experience or a casually expressed opinion based only on instinct or intuition may animate far-reaching change. Overt lobbying works in one capital, but

policy-makers in another may not appreciate it. The pattern of likely paths to success, if only in achieving recognition, is, in short, distinguished principally by its inconsistency. It is utterly impossible to prescribe a universally acceptable way to gain acceptance of a doctrine or of a recommendation for action by the makers of decisions affecting education.

Starting Out in California

The case of California, where lack of predictability may be the reigning political motif, offers a prime example of the good, the bad, and the idiosyncratic. The nation's most populous state is probably its largest employer of special education paraprofessionals even though the seemingly geometric growth of educational and special services of the 1960's has long since given way to budgetary caps. But state and local administrative statutes alternately stipulate and somehow manage to omit provisions for aides, and their prospects in a state that has long been in the forefront of progress on education is, in a word, discouraging. Credentialling is not even visible on a distant horizon. To understand why is to grapple with such forces as these:

- There is neither awareness nor support in the legislature. The state's problems in education are of such titanic magnitude that such lesser matters as standards and incentives for an unorganized group near the bottom levels of those who work in the schools do not attract its attention.

- The section on special education of the state's Education Code of July 1980 specifies the use of aides for a "resource specialist program" but not in the "special classes" section. The title that interprets the Code, and becomes the applicable regulation, provides for aides, but nowhere in the Code or in its implementing regulations is there mention of qualifications or training. The net effect of this inconsistency is, typically, that no one really knows where aides stand.
- Local school administrators have little sensitivity to the world or work of paraprofessionals. Their main interest is in financial matters. If training uses locally appropriated dollars, it is not likely to occur; if outside funds support it, then there will be training.
- The most influential professional organizations have been mute or negative. The executive board of the state's Council for Exceptional Children heard a solicitation for endorsement of the status and training for aides at the tag end of a meeting (5:00 p.m. on a Friday afternoon in February, 1981) and turned it down. The California Teachers Association issued a cautious paper questioning the use of aides in the classroom, because it would affect the teacher-pupil ratio and there was no time to train them. Only the latter's committee on special education has displayed any sympathy.

- Where there are specifications for aides, they are for full-time personnel (or full-time equivalent) for six hours per day with fringe benefits. The use and misuse of these provisions are horror stories in some localities, where administrators hire two aides for three hours apiece, thereby eliminating their benefits, dismiss all aides for the summer, or cut hours after raising wages. (There are also, of course, informed and compassionate administrators who treat aides in an honorable, dignified way; California is a huge state.)
- The community colleges, a genuinely powerful force in higher and adult education in California, stand ready to train the aides and to help them to qualify for some kind of state license, but, on the surface, school systems appear to care little about whether paraprofessionals are receiving training.

Out of this glum background comes an aide who has experienced intimidation, has no status or security, and, like her/his peers in many parts of the country, has little professional self-respect. When they serve children well, it is usually because of an inner desire to help or because a particularly sensitive teacher or administrator has shown the way. But these are not among the preferred paths to recognition for a field.

The problem in California was and, in 1981, still is to lift the special education paraprofessional from this quagmire. In a state that has produced almost no political or public backing, the strategy has

taken a form that may be uniquely suited to California's pathways. Instead of praying for the unexpected or accidental, many of California's trainers of aides and other concerned activists have formed an entity known as the California State Task Force for Special Education Paraprofessional Training. Operating from the premise that first things must come first, the Task Force, which receives limited funding from the state, has centered its main energies on training as a precursor to certification rather than vice versa. Begun in early 1980, the Task Force declared its mission to be the development of "a statewide model for training Special Education paraprofessionals," which it proposed to accomplish through committees that would assume responsibility for

1. Providing research data to support the need for training.
2. Establishing uniform standards and competencies.
3. Recommending appropriate setting for the implementation of training models.
4. Exploring procedures for statewide Special Ed paraprofessional certification.

Despite its imposing title, the Task Force is not an official creation, although representation on it has had an official flavor. Tilted slightly toward trainers from postsecondary institutions but with representation by the state department of education, vocational trainers, school systems, special educators, parents, and paraprofessionals themselves, its complexion is more public than private, and all of its work is openly oriented to changing or determining the state's policy. Created by a

small group headed by Barbara McDonnell of De Anza College in Cupertino, the Task Force quickly set about spotlighting the principal problems that plagued California's special education aides. In their crudest form, as identified at a Task Force session in February, 1980, these turned out to be the familiar refrains of the field since paraprofessionals first began to work with children with handicapping conditions: "lack of uniformity among districts on the role of paraprofessionals, lack of uniform salary schedules, no conference time between teacher and aide which would allow for on-the-job training, lack of teacher preparation and inservice on aide utilization, no salary incentives for aides utilizing training, fear of lack of funding, teachers threatened by increasing responsibilities of aides, lack of fringe benefits for aides, no state regulations mandating training, lack of support from community college chancellor's office, lack of support from state teachers' organizations, and competition between community colleges and state college system for students."

These are, of course, the reasons, slightly localized to reflect special conditions in California, for the field's state of disarray and poor repair. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

The California odyssey since early 1980 has not, however, been a familiar one. The Task Force has been relentless, imaginative, and realistic. If obtaining status for special education aides obliges it to press for legislation, then that is the game to play. If the quest leads to the state bureaucracy, McDonnell and her colleagues are prepared to head in that direction. And when lack of information inhibits

developing rational policies, the Task Force seeks the data that policy-makers require.

The members of the Task Force are all employees of public institutions with little time, almost no money, and, in most cases, the most limited support of their employers. Yet they have managed to dent a system that had previously ignored their field. The state's Commission on Education has provided some financial support for travel to meetings (the Task Force or a core group of ten or so people actually convened seven times in its first year!) and for collection of information. Suggestions for legislation and implementing regulations have gone forward. Officials from state agencies have encouraged the group to weigh in with even more. The outlook, as medical spokespersons are wont to report, is guardedly optimistic.

The story in California has been one of process: of developing procedures, contributing the right language to makers of public policies and of the regulations to carry them out, building connections among concerned groups, and, in a more general sense, of defining and pursuing what appear to be sensible objectives. Too often, however, means such as these become the goals themselves. Single-mindedness sometimes omits a crucial determinant of accomplishment -- the factor of substance. We know, or the California Task Force does, that certain conditions demand attention. We are far less certain, though, that we truly understand the longer-range implications of administrative decisions of the type the Task Force hopes to influence. A thoughtful Barbara McDonnell, who administers a small community college training program while sparking

the Task Force, sometimes wonders whether the whole field really knows very much about itself. Impatient practitioners may be effective advocates, but does any genuinely credible research undergird their contentions about aides? How long can we go, she asks, without real knowledge about such matters as:

- Cost effectiveness; are aides really economical?
- The effect of paraprofessionals on children with specific disabilities.
- The difference, if any, in performance between trained and untrained aides.
- What aides are actually doing in the classroom.
- The real future of special education.

Moving Mountains in Louisiana

If the prognosis for recognition and reward for paraprofessionals is guardedly optimistic in California, it must rate as a near certainty in Louisiana where the education system, with a reputation as one of the country's more conservative, is poised to leap-frog nearly every state in the country in its attention to paraprofessionals. And it did not need a concerted push from an ad hoc grass-roots professional group. Much of the expertise and the sense of how to function in the battlefields of public policy were located right in the state agencies that were to wage the battle.

A background paper of early 1981 on Louisiana's evolving paraprofessional permit system, prepared within the state's Department of Education, notes: "In recognition of the increasing importance of the role of the paraprofessionals in special education programs, Act 754 (the state's law

on educating children with handicapping conditions) regulations require that all paraprofessionals complete a preservice or inservice training program based on a curriculum designed and approved by the Division of Special Educational Services." And if this remarkable specification were not enough to gladden the heart of the pro-training pro-licensing forces, the legislature has mandated that all staff members, including "teacher aide" and "paraprofessional", must be certified.

The path from law to practice has been long, difficult, and vulnerable to changes in weather. It began within the Department in the late 1970s, when a new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, Dr. Henry Smith, inherited a staff that was to grow from one professional employee and an assistant to a corps of 100 qualified professionals. With Act 754 and Public Law 94-142 on the books and demanding a sharper statewide focus on special education, Louisiana, unlike many states, saw little choice but to improve the quality of those who were working with exceptional children in schools and, in rapidly dwindling numbers, in residential institutions. There were 2,085 aides in the state in the 1977-1978 school year and nearly 700 more only three years later. Although many were concentrated in New Orleans, where unionization had produced above-minimum wage salary levels, among other benefits, the cast bulk was spread among the state's 66 parishes (county-level local jurisdictions), of which 64 were using state funds for their salaries. The 66 exercised local responsibility for special education and for the state of preparation and assessment of competency of the aides. With a few scattered exceptions,

their governing group favored improving the qualifications of the aides, sometimes, however, for the less-than-noble reason that they came cheaper than special education teachers, who were in short supply in any case. Supplementing the 2,700 plus aides on board in the schools were 125 more who were working in Special School District #1, the educational facilities in the state's residential institutions.

Like California, Louisiana created a statewide committee that numbers state functionaries, staff members from universities, teachers, officials of state-operated institutions, and paraprofessionals. Firmly under the control of the Department of Education (founded, in fact, by senior staffers Dr. Billy Ray Stokes and Karen Garfield), this body was to develop standards that would serve as the foundation of the training curriculum. As one of its first tasks, it chose to define who and what a special education paraprofessional is in Louisiana. The resultant definition, "a non-certificated person who works under the supervision of a special education teacher or other related professional who has responsibility for the delivery of services to exceptional children," is unique for two reasons: (1) One of its main purposes appears to be to create a sharp distinction between teachers and everyone else; and (2) in addition to instructional aides, it embraces such categories as bus and classroom attendants, social work case managers, occupational and physical therapy aides, screening aides, and a heading called "paraprofessionals training unit personnel." However this definition is interpreted, it is firm and evidently attuned to Louisiana's educational folkways.

Having established the characteristics of the population to be trained and, eventually, sanctioned through a state permit system, the committee examined what kinds of work it performed and the skills necessary for it. Out of these deliberations came three related groupings of training standards that became the basis for two pilot training efforts conducted by the state. The three groupings are actually clusters of tasks and responsibilities that escalate in complexity and difficulty. The first, Level I, is for persons who are not actually instructing children -- bus attendants, for example -- while the second, Level II, covers the main competencies a regular special education teacher's aide would require. Level III is for more special, or specially qualified, aides such as occupational and physical therapy aides. An optional new category, Permit Level IV, was added after the pilot training, to cover those who will earn a two-year degree.

The Louisiana Special Education Permit System has received the approval of the state's elected Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. But putting it into operation remains a tricky process. Action at state levels traditionally requires superior tactical skills of its originators. Too, the authors of the Louisiana system will not rest content with a procedure for licensing. They expect their system to embrace state-wide salary adjustment, state-directed training, and local endorsement and participation. At the same time, they are sensitive to the apprehensions of the state's teachers, who consider themselves underpaid and not properly appreciated. One concession to them was the decision to label the final product a permit system rather than a process of certification

or licensing, which might convey a state grant of professional status to non-professionals. In Louisiana, certification implies completion of a professional training program and the possession of job tenure. The state's paraprofessionals will therefore receive recognition and salary scales as holders of one or more of four levels of permits.

Undaunted by the magnitude of these problems, Garfield and Virginia Beridon of the state education agency continue to ready the new system on several fronts. The summer of 1981 saw them busily at work with a small corps of outside experts, at refining competencies, developing a training curriculum, and preparing to train the trainers who are slated to work with the paraprofessionals. The latter phase may be one of the major strengths of the system. Louisiana's planners may have rediscovered one of the most frequently overlooked, in fact, almost completely ignored, maxims about preparing educational staffers: that training can be no better than the ability and knowledge of the trainers. Throughout our vast educational enterprise, the reigning assumption seems to be that a combination of academic background, experience, and good institutions will produce an adept trainer. This has never been a valid premise, and Louisiana's discernment of its fundamental weakness augurs well for the state's program.

The use of out-of-state authorities as trainers of trainers and as co-developers of the state's training materials assures the new system the benefits of an enormous accumulated store of wisdom in the field. Many training efforts have been sui generis; that is, they proceed from the assumption that very little that has happened in the field is useful in location X, Y, or Z. Judged by theoretical or philosophical criteria

this assessment would have some validity, particularly if the employment and nurturing of aides departed markedly from the well founded order of things in special education. This is patently not the case, however; special education aides function in well defined systems under close control. Local ground rules are important, but they rarely affect the processes and quality of instruction. Louisiana's recognition of these facts of life bodes well for its program.

The trainers of paraprofessionals come from Louisiana, specifically from local education agencies that have nominated persons who, the state hopes, possess a graduate degree, certification in two or more areas of special education, three years of successful teaching experience in special education, and "skill in the facilitation of adult learning." Such persons may be teachers, administrators, "in-service personnel," university faculty members, or others of similar status. They will not be officials of state agencies, and no single university or community college will conduct a program as such or oversee the training process. Nominations of trainers by special education supervisors (and the principals of Special School District One's eight schools) contained a guarantee that they would be allowed to train a specified number of paraprofessionals during the first semester of the 1981-1982 school year and attend the two-day trainers' debriefing session during February 1982.

The state agency has chosen trainers from the 66 parishes throughout the state to participate in an instructors' workshop before facing the aides. After appropriate sign-offs and reporting to the Division of Special Educational Services, the state will issue a numbered permit to

the paraprofessionals with a copy to the employing school district. As a general rule, the aides will receive Level II permits, which Beridon anticipates will cover most categories.

Louisiana is leaving little to chance. The state education agency's bridges to the legislature are in good repair. The authors of the program understand how the bureaucracy works and how to work it for a good cause. Although far from affluent, the state appears prepared to spend the necessary funds to install and make the permit system work. Yet success is by no means guaranteed. Interest must remain high and be fanned, for training and "permitting" aides is hardly a dramatic, attention-grabbing affair. The state's institutions of higher education may feel left out when they come to understand what is happening in the shadow of Louisiana State University's Baton Rouge real estate. And the special issues that concern aides in the state's one large urban center, New Orleans, differ significantly from those of the hinterland.

But these are no longer crucial issues. The Louisiana process is in high gear, and it may provide lessons for many of the other states in the country.

RECRUITMENT: NEW PEOPLE IN NEW ROLES

A school principal in Connecticut:

> "It's a no-win situation. You get a good aide. The kids know and love her. She gets along with the teacher. Things start to happen in the classroom. She talks about training and takes a course or two. We even find a few dollars to help pay her tuition. Then it starts to fall apart. Word gets out that the school board intends to cut back on aides. Our Mrs. Jones sees no future, and we lose her, sometimes to a job as a waitress or factory worker, where she makes more than she ever did with us. We recruit all over again. Only the new ones sometimes aren't as good. The children sense it. Everybody loses. We're lucky if we get back to square one."

An imaginative educator once constructed an ideal career path for the ambitious aspirant to a life of responsible schoolwork: Go straight from graduate school into an administrative post, move through hierarchical steps to the top ranks,and, with the accumulated wisdom of, say, 20 years of such responsibility, seek transfer to the most demanding job of all, that of teacher. Clearly, said the author of this astounding notion, direct contact with the children is the loftiest charge in all of education. Only those who have acquired a modicum of human depth and emotional maturity should even aspire to the mission of instructing the young.

There can, of course, be no higher calling in education. That is why, in an imperfect world, those whose technical qualifications are so ideally suited to it somehow manage to pass most of their professional lives elsewhere. Which is not meant to criticize those who started and have remained in the classroom. Ironically and incorrectly, however, their profession views teachers as occupying one of education's lower rungs.

Most school systems list only sub-professional categories of employees below teachers and all professional groups above!

If this is how and where teachers rank, a circumstance that the statistical surplus of the seventies and the widespread criticism of their profession of the early eighties have not helped, then what of the aides, whose standing has seldom advanced beyond that accorded cafeteria workers and street crossing guards? Except for middle-class suburban women with a desire "to do something constructive during the day," many of those who enter the paraprofessional ranks are already somewhere near the bottom of the nation's economic and social rankings. Whatever their other qualifications to work with young children, especially those with disabling conditions, economic stability and the capacity to yield political influence are not among them. As a group, they cannot yet speak for themselves. It is no overstatement to call them the outcasts of education.

Recruiting aides is neither a fine art nor an especially elevating task. And the wrong people do it. When an administrator in Texas can state truthfully, "We'll take anyone with a warm body and the equivalent, loosely interpreted, of a high school education," he is expressing a fairly representative view of a group whose contribution and importance are not widely appreciated. Or he is demonstrating cynical acceptance of a difficult situation. Short two or three special education paraprofessionals, a principal or superintendent will simply tell the personnel office to round up, look over, and hire, with little more than a cursory interview. The new aide's appearance in the classroom a day or two later is frequently the teacher's first contact with her. Yet that aide is destined to spend more instructional time with exceptional children, especially

those with severe and profoundly disabling conditions, than the teacher herself. Evidently no one considers extraordinary the lack of background, or even of basic knowledge, of the new aide. The teacher is the professional focal point even as the untrained aide does more and more of the jobs that the teachers performed earlier that day. Even the parents somehow overlook the other adult in the classroom. If she matters, their reasoning presumably goes, someone would have told us about her! Also, if the school system hired her, she must be all right.

She usually is alright, of course, but she may not be for much longer. The field is becoming sensitive to its lack of standards and stature. The states sense a need to develop criteria for these new participants in education, and the unions, notably the American Federation of Teachers, are already influential in aides' circles in several cities. In the early eighties, though strikes involving aides are rare and activism from within is ineffectual, the field has showcased few new leaders who would cause concern among the wielders of decision-making power.

As the states develop standards and the trainers fine tune their long-awaited materials to improve the qualifications of those already at work, the field avoids grappling with an issue of enormous sensitivity: the question of where to find better qualified entering paraprofessionals. Those now in the schools are doing their jobs, often in the face of intolerable obstacles, but they do not figure to last more than a few years. (Although there are no accurate nationwide data on burnout or simple dropout from the field, spot checks in 15 scattered locations put the average working life of a special education aide at between three and

four years). As state and federal laws take hold and the education of exceptional children passes from the state of political and social victory to a new phase of creative professionalism, it will require better, and better qualified, people at all levels. It will require people who will enter it as a proud and honorable profession and will intend to stay in it with the solid expectation of tangible rewards.

Where will the aides of the 1980s come from? Simple answer: if conditions don't change, this line of work will continue to attract the mixed bag of lower-income, untrained, caring women who peopled it throughout the 1970s. But this postulation assumes a static economy and the maintenance of current levels of effort in behalf of the population that needs special help in order to help itself. Vary the scenario in several nominally plausible ways though, and the picture changes:

- Assume that the reductions in public expenditures that began in the early 1980s gain wide popular acceptance and cut across political, institutional, and disciplinary lines. By far the least organized category of employees likely to be released or to suffer attrition is the paraprofessional population. Last in, first to go. Except in the rarest of cases, it enjoys no job security, and, most devastating, there would be no one to represent it in higher councils.
- Combine with this baleful prospect a more hopeful, but twin-edged one -- the possibility that measurable advances in our knowledge about handicapping conditions and their treatment will begin to emerge from the research laboratories. Although it would be difficult to assess and assign the new roles that would

inevitably surface, it would be safe to assume that paraprofessionals would start doing new things and, possibly, be asked to do the old things in new ways.

- As the states design and gain political support for various modes of credentialling, licensing, and generally legitimizing aides -- a mixed blessing to unions while welcomed with varying degrees of warmth by current aides -- their place as a subject fit for legislative consideration will inevitably change their role. Without intending expressly to do so, the state may come to dictate the kinds of people who will work with exceptional children. The quality of incoming aides will surely change, although the extent of the change would be dictated by the criteria the individual states legislate.
- Few public pressure groups have been more effective than the parents of children with handicapping conditions. Their tenacity and tactical brilliance helped end overt social and educational discrimination against their children. Neither they nor such effective bodies as the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, which speaks for over 35 million citizens, are likely to reduce the level and intensity of their lobbying. They do not intend to witness a drop in the quality of services their clients receive. On the contrary, despite their certainty that there are serious battles ahead just to hold onto what has been achieved, they demand steady across-the-board improvement.

- The tremendous increase in numbers of children entering the "least restrictive environment" of the public schools with the specific kinds of disabling conditions that had traditionally led to institutionalization is creating needs for different perspectives. Treatment and caretaking are giving way to learning and teaching. The schools are not supposed to provide custodial care. And all of those who work with the new student population must possess certain kinds of knowledge, often including medical information, technological know-how,and a sense of how to deal intelligently with wide emotional swings.

Leaving aside the chronic problems of salary and status, it becomes apparent, through these projections and others that are equally realistic, that the net of recruitment of aides needs widening and deepening. Whether public policies permit it to happen or not, the mandates of the U.S. Congress and most of the 50 state legislatures will be left unserved if the "free and appropriate" education to which children with disabilities are entitled comes from persons basically unqualified to provide it. The obvious riposte is that those in the system need better training. But that's only a partial response. The unfortunate truth may be that some of those nearer the lower end of the school systems' spectrum of instructional staff may not be up to the training. A sizable minority, to be brutally candid, is not qualified for what it does now. Certification, training, even monetary incentives, will mean little if those who receive them come into the system unable to do their jobs.

To suggest a full-scale upgrading of paraprofessionals through new kinds of recruitment is to risk accusations of elitism and of disrespect for the unheralded, undervalued aides now in special education. Whatever the risks, it is worthwhile to examine some potential sources of humanpower to supplant the 50 percent of today's aides who will for reasons of their own leave the field within five years. And if our informal estimates of turnover are approximately correct, virtually every special education paraprofessional in the schools at the start of this decade will be gone by the start of the 1990 s. The earlier states, counties and local communities choose to examine this issue, the greater the yield in improved services will be.

Different sources do not necessarily mean abandoning those that have more or less dependably furnished the schools' special education aides. These should continue to be the major recruiting vein. But the supply base clearly needs broadening both to provide service of higher quality and to embrace much broader public representation in bettering the state of children with handicaps. It may not be enough to spotlight this or that group as a likely contributor, without career ladders, guaranteed jobs, and a greatly improved salary schedule. In a society in which self-improvement (as distinguished, perhaps from personal ambition or acquisitiveness) has become nearly obsessive, how a person passes the work years, or any fraction of them, has taken on new kinds of importance. The questions many potential employees ask have taken different turns: What will I learn that will help me, someone else, or even the human condition? Will the work look like dead time on a personal resume, or will it show psychic rewards, personal development,

respectable professional enhancement? Is experience as a special education aide transferable, preferably with an advance in salary and job classification, to other, completely different fields? Will it always occupy the lowest niche on an organization's totem pole?

Viewed through these lenses, it becomes possible to identify several obvious and a few less apparent categories that might become part of the paraprofessional pipeline.

1. Teachers in Training. Even though critical shortages of special education teachers have plagued public education for many years, many excellent young people are still entering the field. Their university-based training remains centered on classroom work, limited on-site observation, research and, near the end, practice teaching, usually for periods of six to twelve weeks. Not until late in their post-secondary education do these future teachers receive sustained exposure to children with handicaps.

Recommendation: Design a five-year bachelor's degree program that would include a year's internship as an aide rather than as a teacher trainee or intern, which is more typical of the handful of existing fifth-year programs. This would be a paid year, both in salary at prevailing rates for paraprofessionals and academic credit, but the job would be that of an aide not that of an educational officer cadet. During this internship, the future teacher would (a) work at the closest possible range with children who live with major disabling conditions, (b) report periodically to a university faculty advisor, (c) learn how to collaborate

with paraprofessionals in her/his future career, and (d) most important, decide whether to enter the field of special education. Most of the principal advantages are clear: trained paraprofessionals in the schools at no extra cost, the enthusiasm and creativity of the young in classrooms that may have lost their vitality, better qualified teachers, and an opportunity for administrators to size up new talent.

2. Recent Secondary School Graduates. An informed guess would peg the average age of special education aides at 35, with a 95 percent preponderance of women. Work as an aide has become something of a second career for women whose children are in school or beyond, but it is usually not the central focus of their lives. They did not choose the field on leaving high school (except in residential settings, it scarcely existed before 1965), nor was there any way to train in secondary school to enter it. By the late 1970s, a few public secondary institutions had begun to promote limited work-study arrangements in their curricula for aide-level work with children with handicapping conditions. Some of the early participants have found permanent employment in the field after graduation.

Recommendation: Expand and popularize this channel for preparing and recruiting recently trained young workers. The planners of vocational programs in the secondary schools seem to skirt training for human services, preferring to develop workers exclusively for the technical and secretarial fields. Yet, countless high school

students are interested in the helping professions but don't know how to prepare to work in them. This source could provide for the paraprofessional ranks a cadre of young practitioners who would (a) become the nucleus of a genuine career ladder, (b) want more training, (c) be closer in age to the children they would work with, and (d) come to the job with a clear understanding of its purpose, limitations, and potential for a satisfying career.

3. Retired Workers and Second Careerists. The past 20 years have witnessed important changes in the ways many people occupy their middle and senior years. They leave their first careers earlier in life. They have fewer qualms about changing fields and styles of living. Some achieve economic security, become less acquisitive, and seek different, socially useful things to do. They become more curious intellectually and want to expand their experience. Many are looking for causes to support but do not find volunteer work to be the answer. "If a thing is worth doing," said one 63-year-old realtor turned special education aide, "it's worth doing for money. Whether I need the salary or not, I want to know that someone thinks enough of my work to pay for it."

Recommendation: Tap these rich lodes. There is a potentially vast pool of strong new paraprofessionals in the middle-aged and older categories of Americans. No two communities would recruit in the same way, but several attractions seem to commend themselves in most locales: flexible employment practices (off-beat schedules, half-time jobs, flextime); the exploitation of already acquired

capabilities and personal qualities (patience, mediation, technical skills); and cooperation with the area's community colleges to attract this group with sensitively designed, possibly individualized, training regimens. In contrast to, or balancing, the teachers-in-training and the products of secondary school vocational education, the retired or second careerist would bring special education: (a) a larger, more practical sense of the world, (b) the challenge of other, often successful, ways of doing things, and (c) a readiness to accept imperfection while applying common sense and mature wisdom to dealing with it.

4. Servants of Conscience. Intermittent national debate on obliging young people to contribute military service or an acceptable substitute for a year or two has produced no visible consensus for or against the idea, and it is far beyond the scope of this report to add to the discussion. Along the way, however, many young middle-class Americans have persuaded themselves that life must offer more than college graduation, an executive traineeship in business, and a specialized professional career, complete with anxieties, frustrations, and questionable rewards. In earlier times, they took odd jobs or sought the meaning of life for a year in Europe. More recently, they have beaten a path to the Peace Corps or Vista to do their thing. Some, in times of the military draft, became conscientious objectors and performed their service

equivalent, often reluctantly, as hospital orderlies or ditch-diggers. Many of their younger siblings are cut out of the same cloth: reluctant to get started on the journey to the three-martini lunch, semi-ready to do something much more useful, and yet unsure of how to locate and become involved in it.

Recommendation: Go after them. They are easy to find. These young people are not customarily the targets of corporate recruiters, usually because of mutual lack of interest rather than lack of intelligence or ability. They can be enlisted. The normal competition is a couple of years of drifting or unrewarding, low-skill clerical or menial jobs. They are much too good for these choices. Treated in an honest way, these people can begin to find themselves through a larger cause like service to children with various disabling conditions. They are often the most sensitive, caring people, not the oddballs, in their families. They could be an important resource to special education.

5. New Careerists. By the early 1980s, it was no longer fashionable for policy-makers to create and fund bold, imaginative ways to spur poor people to help themselves. But this should not be the rationale for overlooking solid, cost-effective practices that stood the test of the realities of the previous 15 years. Notable among them was the simple idea that providing jobs, or training for them, was not enough. People from low-income areas should be able to learn more about their field,

advance within and beyond it, move laterally into similar or related fields, and, central to the notion of the new careers movement, have a voice in the affairs of the enterprise they were serving. The idea attracted wide support and took hold, with varying degrees of success, in several paraprofessional fields. Somehow it never assumed a central place in special education, though, and the new aide in this field had few prospects for the benefits of new careerism. She got what was, and largely remains, a job. No more, no less.

Recommendations: Recruitment must be coupled with incentives. A heady partial listing provided by Jeptha V. Greer, now Executive Director of the Council for Exceptional Children, formerly with the DeKalb County, Georgia, school system, included a master salary schedule for everyone in the school from principal to aide, specific responsibility, advancement based on competence and experience, merit pay, fringe benefits, health insurance, and so forth. The systems that provide these and others recruit well; the others, the overwhelming preponderance, fail to attract the capable potential paraprofessional from the ghetto, barrio, reservation, inner city, and mountain hollow. However attractive the new sources discussed earlier may be, these will for years to come be the main source of aides for the schools. This is a field that should not function on the basis of supply and demand swings. The stakes are too high to permit the alternate bestowing and pulling back of the goodies everyone else in education has enjoyed for decades.

6. Community Colleges. An earlier publication in this series noted that community colleges are the natural habitat for training aides even though performance has not always matched promise. They were not cited as a potential source of new blood because improving the skills of those already at work was (and remains) the most urgent preoccupation of the field. When a modicum of stability materializes, however, the two-year college may, in fact should, turn into an important source of new, well-trained, career-minded special education paraprofessionals. It is not just the people's college, a place where adults of all ages can pursue vocational and intellectual aspirations. It is a place in which to sample options and make personal decisions. Thousands of young or returning older students step for the first time onto the campuses of the country's 1,200 two-year colleges. Like the "servants of conscience" mentioned earlier, they are available. But they will be understandably demanding, in a sellers' market, of both trainer and employer.

Recommendation: Two things are imperative: (a) The hiring school system must spread the net of recruitment beyond the casual walk-in, the employed aide's neighbor, and the responder to want ads, and into nearby post-secondary institutions -- especially into their departments of training for the human services, career guidance, and placement; and (b) the community college has to assess demand and training emphases through regular contacts with the school system.

In only a microscopic number of localities do these two things happen. If they were more prevalent, a lot of excellent people would become special education paraprofessionals.

UNIONS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS

In an industrial suburb of Los Angeles, a veteran paraprofessional commented, in terms remarkably similar to those of her peers elsewhere in the country, on what the typical special education aide needed and wanted out of her professional life.

"Maybe four or five things really matter. It's hard to put them into any kind of order, so I won't try. But I'll bet that paras just about anywhere would agree with me on what they are.

"Right up front I'd put responsibility -- knowing what I'm supposed to do and how I'm supposed to do it. I don't want to get type-cast into one kind of thing, and I'm always ready to do what's needed to make the classroom work better. But I want to know what my job is, and I want to spend most of my time doing it as well as I can.

"Along the same lines, I want to know that I count for something. We aides have been dumped on for a long time. In most places, we don't have any status. If there are ever really enough special ed teachers, we're in trouble even if we've been there for ten years. No matter how you slice it, we're at the bottom of the scale on pay. Sure, there are places here and there where paras make almost as much as the janitor or even the school secretary, but the system is still rigged against us. We're the ones working with some pretty demanding kids under tough conditions. Yet we usually don't have work in the summer, and our benefits are a laugh in most places. Why?

"We want to be good at our jobs. But it's not so easy if we can't get away for training, or there isn't any training available when we can.

I know there's a real push on to train special education aides, but I don't see it getting anywhere while the dollars are short. We're supposed to be grateful that we have our jobs. Training is the frosting on the cake. That's short-sighted thinking.

"The last thing, maybe the first for a lot of people, is something I can't quite put my finger on. Maybe it's a lot of things combined: things like being recognized for what we do and not just as an Aide II or an Instructional Assistant, being able to follow through with a kid from one year to the next, being part of the group that figures out what a kid really needs, going home knowing you've done something that mattered without spending the day on a lot of busy work and bureaucratic nonsense. I guess I'm talking about job satisfaction."

To distill these remarks, the paraprofessional seems to require clear responsibility, recognition and status, adequate salary, training, and job satisfaction. In most lines of work these are, in varying degrees, the givens. Or they are, at the least, within sight or range. Not so for the special education aides who rarely encounter all five and must somehow locate external support if they are to begin to achieve them. As employees of tax-supported governmental bodies, they are part of something much larger than and far beyond themselves. It has become axiomatic, moreover, that even their minimal requirements are unlikely to be met without a substantial push from the "outside world." But the push will surely not come, except in the rarest of circumstances, from the systems in which they function or, regrettably, from their own ability to look after their own collective welfare.

Enter the labor unions of America! The aides are, on the surface, their fair game: underpaid unrepresented part of a field that has grown dramatically in a decade, but lagging far behind comparable others in benefits, security, wage scales, and potential for advancement. All of these are, of course, in the heartland of union country, and the special education paraprofessionals are presumably ripe for the plucking.

There are few valid statistics on the extent to which special education aides have become members of unions. Large numbers of them remain unaware that this avenue even is open to them. Many who are long-time union sisters and brothers do not know -- as bus drivers, CETA trainees, warehouse clerks, or secretaries -- that their locals consider them to be paraprofessionals. Those who are not members often nurse the suspicions of unions that still prevail in large parts of rural, conservative America. Many wouldn't join if they could because unions are "run by big-city outsiders who don't understand who we are or what we do."

By 1982, the unionization of special education aides had nevertheless become a factor in the field. Its occurence and intensity were uneven, but paraprofessionals in several of the nation's largest cities were in or coming into the fold, usually that of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) of the AFL-CIO. But the AFT and its various affiliates, such as its New York arm, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT),was not the only interested recruiter. A jumble of others was also vying, often successfully, for the attention and loyalty of the aides. At various locations, aides were being wooed and often won by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (also part of the AFL-CIO), the Teamsters International, the United Automobile Workers, the American Federation of

Government Employees, and even the Firemen and Oilers. And there are or will be others, including the teacher's own national employees' association, the National Education Association, which offer the benefits of membership as "educational support personnel."

A labor-management agreement can do much for a field and the people in it. Arrangements in several large cities give the aides a strong sense of who they are and where they fit into the school system. They yield few surprises, and they give the employees certain recourse. As members of the same local as the teachers, the aides know that there will always be a connection, even if loose, between their interests and those of their nominal superiors. Almost more than anything else, unionization lifts paraprofessionals from the obscurity and anonymity that have bedeviled them into a recognizable and respectable niche in education.

What works in large urban settings may not be effective elsewhere. And there are often sharp distinctions among cities and among the aides themselves. Some paraprofessionals who now belong to unions appear to be less than grateful for new patterns they detect in their lives even though many remember what work life was like in the long years of non-affiliation. They claim to discern new demands upon them for multiple loyalties: to their employers, to the children, and to the union local. A layer has been added to their daily lives, a new element that is vigorous, intrusive, and resists intimidation by bureaucratic forces. And it is irreverent, a quality that does not always endear it to local administrative establishments. Even in cases where contracts cannot guarantee jobs, the unions continue to push, to probe, and to find new ways to advance the

interests of their members. Some of the newly enrolled aides are not enchanted by their tactics; but they never reject the outcomes.

The "old unionists" among the paraprofessionals have long since accepted public service unionism as a key feature of their careers. They regard the prerogatives that the union agreement has brought them as their due: the regular raises, the benefits packages, the provisions for paid vacation and sick time, and the gradual path to seniority in their field. Not all of the newer recruits share their satisfaction, even though, as a young member in New Orleans put it, "I couldn't imagine living without the union...but I'm not always crazy about the way they operate and some of the things they do."

She was not complaining; she was simply reiterating the paraprofessionals' version of the truism that the bitter sometimes accompanies the sweet. A sampling of the combinations that bedevil some unionists and their backers:

- Seniority. Respect for it is at or near the core of any accord between management and workers. The respect is warranted. In practice, though, the principle may stand on a shaky foundation. Even the most ardent unionist acknowledges that a trained and enthusiastic new careerist of whatever age may be a more desirable employee than a tired veteran who has stopped learning, has lost enthusiasm, and is merely serving out his or her time. Yet this old trouper often survives budget slashes and receives preference for training, while the newcomer may be sent packing or be

denied access to the tools for self-improvement. Seniority leads to close and difficult calls.

- Others First. Special education aides are almost never the primary concern of their unions. They are latecomers and not an especially stable force. The heart of the AFT's membership is teachers (even though the Federation has achieved astonishing gains for paraprofessionals) just as government employees, factory workers, drivers, and public service workers form the core groups within the other unions that enroll or are interested in special education aides. Even within those groups that may represent them with great skill, paraprofessionals still fight for a place in the sun. The unions accept them without reservation, but they are not always sensitive to the culture in which they work. (This observation does not apply to the AFT/UFT or NEA; it has understandable validity, though, in judgments of the others as promoters of the interests of paraprofessionals.)
- Training. The unions believe in in-service training as a channel to advancement and improved service by their members. This does not, however, summarize their general attitude toward it. In some places, they want to control its content and direction, even though management may have somewhat different views of the system's needs and priorities. In others, they are willing to tolerate almost

any kind of training, including that which has minimal relevance to jobs, if it can be used as evidence that the trainee thereby merits advancement. The unions walk a fine, sometimes inconsistent, line on the subject. Their advocacy of training is strong, but it is often nowhere to be found in the contract.

- Unionism vs. Professionalism. The union does not customarily meet the paraprofessionals' need for professional representation. It guards and advances their interests as workers, but it seldom looks to the field as a whole. This is not its central focus, nor should it be, although its precise delineations of categories of employees and of their finite responsibilities and conditions of work do much to set the parameters of paraprofessionalism in specific localities. In this, as in many other sectors, the unions tend to supplement and even supplant the authority of public bodies. Whether they promote the field or not -- and, on balance, it would be exceptionally difficult to deny their beneficial impact -- they are an enormously influential force in it wherever they are at work.

The place of unionism in the world of special education aides is becoming clearer. So is the growing movement toward credentialing, or licensing, or issuing permits. The two are not incompatible, nor are

they notably close to one another despite the identity of interests and objectives they seem to symbolize. It is still too early to know whether the unions and the "credentiallers" will split the pot, fight over it, or ignore one another. More likely the latter if only because (1) the unionization of special education aides remains limited to a relatively small number of large cities, (2) the movement toward credentialing is taking place, by and large, in states that are not strongholds of unionism in public service or education, and (3) neither group is seriously threatened by the other. The unions are not enamored of the tightly organized and orchestrated designs for professional qualifications, rewards, and training that comprise the licensing arrangements. For their part, the states that are moving into these almost uncharted waters are apprehensive about imposing lower standards than the unions may already have achieved for their members.

PROSPERITY, SURVIVAL, OR DISASTER?

Wise but anguishing words from a pragmatic Southern educational leader:

"We were reaching the point a few years ago where hard was soft and soft was hard. In other words, the mentality of retrenchment, austerity, the threat of financial collapse, call it what you will, had reduced local tax revenues and the amount of 'hard' dollars we could depend on. At the same time -- for 15 years, in fact -- Washington was gushing forth more soft bucks every year. We sensed we were headed for a fall, but I don't know anyone who turned the federal money back.

"Now both spigots are nearly off or, at best, on hold, and the tragedy is that some of the really good things we've taken for granted for a generation may have to go by the board. We did almost nothing to get them into the bloodstream of the schools so that the kids wouldn't lose their benefits. It's patriotic to talk about the three Rs, but it's just as noble to have well-trained staff, decent facilities, and a fair shot for kids who started out with less than their classmates. Your training for special education aides is part of the nobility we may be losing. And much of the fault is ours for not doing anything when we could all see it coming."

This administrator voices some widely held sentiments about the undependability of the flow of public funds. Pledges from government that appear safely insurable by Lloyd's of London turn out to be ephemeral semi-commitments as external resources start to evaporate. And the possibility

that a compatible, more bountifully funded, peer program -- perhaps a nearby program in vocational rehabilitation or developmental disabilities -- will offer to form an ad hoc consortium scarcely exists in the early 1980s. The human services, especially the newer forms and those that do not directly serve needy clients, have fallen under siege in much of the nation. No amount of organizational genius can create vibrant life forms out of rhetoric and good intentions.

How, then, can the good works of paraprofessional training, a relative newcomer to education, remain part of a diminishing educational enterprise? Or, in the jargon of the social scientists, can the temporary organizations become institutionalized? If, as the Southern leader said, "we did nothing to get them into the bloodstream...", has the field shot its wad? Or is there still time to regroup and look to a respectable future?

Retention, survival, continuation, institutionalization. They all mean nearly the same thing: keeping the field alive, growing, and of ever-higher quality. Central to these tasks is maintaining and increasing the level of involvement by special education aides in educating children with disabling conditions. If improving the educational opportunities of these children remains a high priority imperative of public policy and of those who decide how to fund it, then most or all of the aides in place in 1982 will stay at their posts, and more may enter the field.

It is too simple and self-serving, however, to blur distinctions between gratitude that the field will presumably survive and concern that an important force that energized it — the training of highly motivated paraprofessionals -- may dissipate. The concern is as well founded as any

in public education today. How, to put it directly, can training weather slashes in public services, stay abreast of the times, and, conceivably, demonstrate how vital it is?

The answers, if indeed they exist at all, do not form a coherent whole. They are a pastiche of reasonably informed opinion, judgment calls, and reasonably valid evidence. Special education is, after all, a new field that remains widely unknown in both health and education. The key people in it still number in the double digits, and even they approach it from so many perspectives and starting points that there is only limited consensus on how to maintain and improve the health of para-professional training.

It is far too early to tell about the future of this field. But it is not premature to reexamine some of the once valid assumptions that have guided it. They may have been workable when the training of special education aides acquired momentum in the mid-1970s, but circumstances have shifted so strikingly since then, and experience has been such a persuasive teacher, that they appear in 1982 as relics of a nearly forgotten past. Here are some of the givens that may require redefinition in the years immediately ahead:

1. Availability of Support from External Sources

Some of the most innovative and effective programs have depended on one isolated federal grant of limited, sometimes unpredictable, duration. Such efforts do not normally have the time or credibility they require to become more than a fleeting part of the system in which they operate. While it may appear unwise to reject funds from any source, it may be equally ill-advised to accept them without local commitments that the

funded endeavor will receive the guarantee of an eventual permanent place, with or without external support, in the system of which it is part. To do otherwise would be to raise expectations falsely.

2. Independence from Larger Bureaucracies

It seems almost fatalistic to say so, but the potential for the well-endowed outsider to cut a swath through a community's educational life may be over. Once-hospitable school systems no longer always welcome the well-intentioned intruder, usually bearing federal monies, who stands ready to point them in a direction favored by the bureaucracy on the Potomac. Nor are the reduced, revamped versions of earlier structures of external support, whether as segments of state-administered block grants or similar devices, likely to gain instant acceptance. Only if they come without strings, external monitoring, and accountability as to content will they have a chance of success. Even then, once bitten, twice shy local trainers will be reluctant to start down a path of weak commitment and uncertain larger objectives.

3. Licensing and Credentialling

This is not, as a general proposition, a time for creating new standards and administrative mechanisms. Any state or local jurisdiction considering doing either should be attentive to a continuing public mood against anything that smacks of centralization and managerial expense. It should, in short, be very sure of its ground. Which is not meant to minimize the advantages of a sensible credentialling system for aides nor to call into question the signal achievements of Kansas, Louisiana, Texas, and the others that have developed or installed exceptionally sensitive

processes. Unless a procedure for licensing paraprofessionals responds to actual conditions (rather than to an idealized future state of affairs), however, its sponsors should think seriously about tabling it. Imperfect though it may be, local initiative may be the best answer for the indefinite future. The main point about credentialling at a time when it could be used to hurt rather than help the profession is to proceed warily.

4. The Vocational Route

To place the training of paraprofessionals in the vocational or technical track of secondary schools and community colleges may be to characterize it as a field of only limited academic and, therefore, professional character. This could change perspective on it in some quarters by putting it on the same footing with the preparation of mechanics, dental technicians,and firefighters. It could diminish the special aura that some of the trainers believe special education has achieved. But such a location is realistic at a time when vocational and technical training is firmly implanted and dependably funded. In the world beyond training, where they live and work, the mechanic and the hygienist may earn twice the wages of the aide and enjoy far more of the benefits of their field. This is not bad company for special education paraprofessionals. Or for anyone. Colleges don't always train students to get their hands dirty in the big world. Voo-tech institutes do. And they will last unto eternity. If they consider training special educational aides to be within their scope of work, the field should leap to their embrace.

5. Permanent Need for Aides

To those in the field, it is unthinkable that the demand for trained, qualified aides will ever be slaked. The reasons for the need to increase their number are as valid in 1982 as they have ever been: greater positive attention to people with disabilities, the rapid evacuation of institutional facilities, favorable public laws and policies, rectification of generations of abuse and discrimination, more work for the public schools, and others in an endless list. It has been a sellers' market. Anyone wanting a job as a special education aide could select from among many opportunities, as long as the chooser didn't mind exceptionally hard work for exceptionally low wages with exceptionally poor job benefits. That's the way it's been, and it may be a long time before this once typical set of affairs exists again. Jobs were still readily available in most locations in the early 1980s, but heavy storm signals were in the air. The axe was already falling on the aides in non-special education settings, and the national political pendulum was swinging away from the detailed regulations of the type exemplified by Public Law 94-142.

One immediate upshot of this swing could be an increase in the instructional time of the teacher accompanied by a reduction of the time and role of the aide. On the surface, such a drift appears healthy, but this may not be a valid condition. Aides are valuable because, among other things, they offer more personal individualized, attention to children who need it, often desperately, and because they enable teachers to aim their specialized knowledge more effectively. They are not in classrooms because public laws decree it; they are there to help some very special young people who cannot function adequately without them.

But these assumptions may matter little at a time of consolidation and cutback. While it can only be beneficial to have a pool of trained paraprofessionals available, trainers must keep a sharp eye fastened on the job market. If it is diminishing, they must be prepared to accept the fact of reduced opportunities for their products. The tangible need may be there, but the positions and resources to meet it may not be.

LADDERS, LATTICES, AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

There is an underappreciated aspect to paraprofessional employment. Working as a paraprofessional in the areas of disability, the human services, and public education can lead to career advancement. At an admittedly limited number of sites, often those at which there is a degree of unionization, qualified aides have been able to move upward to more responsible posts and laterally into different specialties within their larger field. Out of such opportunities have come incentives and expectations, personal growth and satisfaction with jobs, more money, and, in some cases, the once-impossible leap, accompanied by hard digging, into full professional status as teachers. Those days, to put it simply, may be behind us.

Because they add expense and complexity, the ladders and lattices have never been among the most attractive aspects of the world of paraprofessionals in the minds of the dispensers of public funds. The few manifestations of advancement for aides that remain may not be long for this world. Their enormous social advantages notwithstanding, aides often represent an alien force in a school system: yet another internal structure that wasn't there a decade ago and that competes with more solidly entrenched groups and interests for attention, jobs, and dollars. And, to quote the chilling remarks of a school board member in Massachusetts: "We're doing too much for handicapped kids already. Our hearts go out to them, but they're skewing our budgets. We've just got to cut down wherever we can."

TRAINING AS AN IMPERATIVE

It has taken the better part of the 1970's to persuade the makers of educational decisions that trained aides are better, on the whole, than untrained ones. Many finally realize that expanding the knowledge and skills of their paraprofessionals benefits everyone involved in educating children with handicapping conditions. But this is not a cause that will send school boards, administrators, and even parents into legislative chambers with drawn swords. The fate of training for aides is not even an especially valuable bargaining point. Like many other newcomers (consumer education, community education, teacher centers, energy education), it has not had enough time to document success or to build broadly based coalitions of support. Its partisans are less skilled as advocates than their peers in some of the other fields that are coming under siege.

The fact that these criteria for survival appear unrelated to the intrinsic virtues of the cause is, unfortunately, of no particular importance. It merely mirrors the way things are in the merciless business of survival. The case for training aides in special education has demonstrable educational, economic, administrative, and human merits. Remove one prop of support -- a state law or part of P.L. 94-142, for example -- and the case remains, ruffled but intact. It is not metric education, which collapses without a strong political pledge; preparing aides is a thoroughly defensible and needed activity. But it gets little tangible support and some undeserved resentment for allegedly draining scarce resources from other needy fields. It is a short step for some persons of influence to conclude that their system can live without it.

An eternal maxim of the leaders of relatively new, somewhat specialized, educational fields like the preparation of special education aides has been that a few well-placed dealers in political fortune could both protect and advance their interests. The late President Lyndon B. Johnson once said: "The time to make friends is before you need them." The maxim will always be valid, but it may be less important in the eighties than it was a generation earlier. What this proves about public policy is open to interpretation; what it doesn't prove is that political trade-offs and cloakroom machinations are the necessary keys to honorable survival.

"END OF DOCUMENT"